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THE BATTLES OF LIFE.

THE IRONMASTER.

VOL. I.

THE BATTLES OF LIFE.

THE IRONMASTER.

FROM THE FRENCH OF

GEORGES OHNET,

AUTHOR OF

"LA COMTESSE SARAH," "LISE FLEURON," ETC. ETC.

By LADY G. O.

Osborne,

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.



IN all that I have written I have sought carefully to adhere to the idiom and language of the highly-talented Author.

G. O.

June, 1884.

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RESERVE

THE IRONMASTER.



CHAPTER I.

ON a bright and sunny day in the month of October, 1880, a young man, in a becoming shooting costume, was seated at the edge of one of those beautiful oak woods which cover with their cool shade the first foot-hills of the Jura. A large dark brown spaniel was lying in the heather at a few paces from his master, gazing at him with wistful eyes, seeming to ask if they were not soon to set out again.

The sportsman did not appear disposed

to resume his walk. His gun was resting against the trunk of a tree, his empty game-bag thrown to the other side of the ditch, and, with his back turned to the sun, his chin supported in his hand, he allowed his eyes to wander over the beautiful panorama spread out before him.

At the other side of the road, on the border of which he had halted, were some trees of large growth, with branches usually lopped once in two years, whose trunks, sparsely scattered, grew like islets of verdure in the midst of the red-brown ferns and tall yellow grasses. The ground, densely wooded, sloped gently to the valley, beyond which could be seen in the meadows the market town of Pont-Avesnes, and rising above the red roofs of its houses the slated belfry,—pointed in the form of an extinguisher,—of the old church. To the right, the Château, sur-

rounded by wide moats, drained and planted with fruit trees. The Avesnes, a thin thread of water, that the inhabitants ambitiously called "the river," wound, sparkling like a silver ribbon between the stunted willows with quivering foliage, which fringed its banks.

Farther on, the Foundry,—the tall chimneys of the smelting furnaces spouting out a red smoke swept away by the wind,—extended its black walls to the foot of the hill, whose layers of rock were pierced by large holes in order to extract the ore. Above these excavations flourished the vines from which is produced a thin white wine, having a flavour of gun-flint, that is sold readily under the name of Moselle. A deep peace lay over this smiling landscape. And the air was so pure that across the intervening space the dull sound of the hammers at the iron-

works ascended from the valley to the forest.

Lulled by the calm that surrounded him, the young sportsman remained immovable. By degrees the country ceased to attract his attention. A feeling of profound well-being had stolen over him, his ideas lost themselves in a delicious languor. And he smilingly followed his thoughts, which were wandering back into the realms of the past. The sun revolving in his course gilded the reddening tops of the lofty trees, a heavy heat rose from the ferns, and the silence of the woods became more unbroken.

He was abruptly aroused from his meditation. A cold damp nose was quietly placed in his hand, while two eyes, with an expression more than human, addressed to him a dumb prayer.

“Ah! Ah!” said the young man,

“thou art weary, my good old dog? Now, do not be impatient; we will set out again.”

And rising, with a sigh, he threw over his shoulders the strap of his game-bag, passed his gun under his arm, then, crossing the road, sprang over a narrow ditch and entered among the lopped trees.

The spaniel was already hunting in the long grass. Suddenly he stopped near a blackberry-bush; his paw raised, his neck outstretched, motionless as if he had been changed into stone, his tail gently moving, and with his eyes seeming to call his master, who advanced rapidly. At the same moment a large hare bounded from his form, showing his yellow croup and spinning along like a cannon-ball. The young man shouldered his gun and fired hastily. When the smoke had cleared off, he saw, without astonishment,

but with chagrin, his hare vanishing in the great wood.

“Another miss !” murmured he. And, turning to the spaniel who was waiting for him with a disappointed air, “What a misfortune, eh ? Thou didst find it so well !”

As he spoke, a shot was fired a hundred yards from the young sportsman. Then, after a minute of silence, a sound of steps was heard under the long branches of the trees ; they were thrust aside, and a man of a vigorous figure, clad in a blouse of blue linen, shod with thick boots, wearing upon his head a hat that had seen service, appeared at the edge of the wood. In one hand he held his gun, with the other he carried by its hind legs the hare that had just left its form.

“It seems that you have been more fortunate than myself,” said the young

sportsman, smiling, and walking towards the new-comer.

“Ah! it is you who fired, Monsieur?” said the man in the blouse.

“Yes, and very awkwardly; for that hare sprang up under my feet, and I fired at him at twenty paces.”

“Truly, it was not brilliant!” replied the man in the blouse with irony. “But how does it happen, Monsieur, that you are shooting in this part of the forest?”

“I shoot here,” said the young man with some little astonishment, “because I have the right . . . ”

“I doubt it. These woods belong to M. Derblay, who does not allow any one to set foot in them.”

“Ah! Ah! the Ironmaster of Pont-Avesnes,” answered the young man, with a little hauteur. “If I am on his ground, it is without knowing it, and I am alto-

gether vexed. I must have lost myself. You are, probably, the gamekeeper of M. Derblay ?”

“And you, who are you ?” said the man in the blouse, without answering the question that had been put to him.

“I am the Marquis de Beaulieu ; and I beg you to believe that I am not in the habit of poaching.”

At these words the man in the blouse reddened, and bowed with deference :

“Will you excuse me, M. le Marquis ; if I had known to whom I was speaking, I should not have permitted myself to accost you, nor to ask of you these explanations. Continue your sport, I beg, it is I who will retire.”

While his interlocutor was speaking, the young Marquis observed him more attentively. Under his rustic attire he had a commanding presence. His face, framed

by a black beard, was handsome and intelligent. His hands were delicate and well cared for. Above all, he carried, suspended from his shoulder, a gun of costly simplicity, like those that the English gunsmiths know how to make.

“I thank you,” replied the Marquis coldly; “but I have not the honour of being acquainted with M. Derblay. I only know that he is a troublesome neighbour, with whom we are not on good terms. I shall not fire another shot upon his ground. I have only been at Beaulieu since yesterday. I am not well acquainted with the country, and my love of sport led me beyond our boundaries; but I shall not trespass here again.”

“As you please, M. le Marquis,” gently answered the man in the blouse. “M. Derblay would, however, have been very happy, I can assure you, to prove to you,

on this occasion, that if he is a troublesome neighbour, it is in spite of himself . . . He has encroached upon the domain of Beaulieu in order to construct a railway for mining purposes . . . You may be certain that he regrets it, and that he is ready to indemnify you suitably. The boundaries between neighbours are sometimes uncertain," added he, smiling . . . "you have discovered that yourself . . . Do not, therefore, judge M. Derblay without knowing him . . . Later you would undoubtedly repent of your severity."

"You are a friend of the Ironmaster? . . . " said the Marquis, looking at the man in the blouse. "One of his clerks, perhaps, for you defend him warmly."

"Believe me, it is quite natural, M. le Marquis."

And abruptly changing the conversation :

“But you do not appear to have been very successful, either at Beaulieu or at Pont-Avesnes. M. Derblay is an ardent sportsman, and he would be mortified if it could be said that you had left his grounds without taking game with you. Will you have this hare, that you so obligingly beat up, and add to it these four partridges?”

“I cannot accept them,” replied quickly the Marquis. “Keep them, I beg you; you will disoblige me by insisting . . .”

“At the risk of displeasing you, I still insist,” answered the man in the blouse. “I shall deposit this game on the other side of the ditch. You are at liberty to leave it there. It will be so much gain to the fox . . . I have the honour to salute you, M. le Marquis.”

And with a single stride he entered the great wood, quickening his pace as he went.

“Monsieur ! Monsieur !” cried the Marquis.

But the sportsman was already out of sight.

“Here is a strange adventure,” murmured the young man ; “what shall I do?”

An unexpected intervention put an end to his hesitation. The spaniel ran towards the ditch, and, taking with precaution a partridge in his mouth, carried it carefully, and laid it at the feet of his master. The Marquis began to laugh, and patting the dog :

“Thou wilt not that we return empty-handed, it appears !”

And introducing into his game-bag the hare and the four partridges, with a step a little heavier from this unusual burden, the young man regained the road to his dwelling.

The Château of Beaulieu, a building of

the style of Louis XIII., consists of the body of the edifice and two wings. It is of white stone, picked out with red bricks. The pointed roofs of the wings are surmounted by tall, sculptured chimneys of a grand character. A wide terrace, of upwards of five hundred yards in length, bordered by a parapet of reddish stone, stretches in front of the Château, and is laid out in flower-beds. It is reached by a flight of eight stone steps. Beneath this perron is a grotto. Climbing plants have entwined and flung their tendrils and flowers over the balustrade of wrought iron, offering to the hand a perfumed support.

This terrace, looking to the south, is, in the autumn, a delicious promenade. The view from thence is charming. The Château, standing upon the slope of the hill, which faces the vineyards and quarries

of Pont-Avesnes, is surrounded by a park of seventy or eighty acres, which descends by a gentle declivity to the valley. The foundry of M. Derblay has a little spoiled the beauty of the landscape, and troubled the calm of the country. But, such as it is, the residence is still one of the most desirable.

For many long years it had been deserted. The Marquis de Beaulieu, the father of the young sportsman, towards 1845, finding himself at the age of twenty the master of a superb fortune, began to lead in Paris a life of extravagance. He came, however, every year in the shooting season, to pass three months at Beaulieu. It was a *fête* then for the aristocracy of the whole neighbourhood, and the ostentatious prodigality of the châtelain enriched the country throughout the winter months.

When the Revolution of 1848 burst out, the vine-dressers of Pont-Avesnes, electrified by the socialistic tirades of a few of the ringleaders, took it into their heads to reward the generous assistance that the Marquis had given to them, by pillaging his Château.

Under the folds of the red flag, armed with guns, with scythes, and with pitchforks, they marched to Beaulieu, singing loudly the *Marseillaise*. They drove in the iron gates that the concierge obstinately refused to open, and, spreading over the Château, set themselves to plunder, breaking all that they could not carry away. The most enterprising of the band, having found the entrance to the cellars, from robbery they passed to feasting. The wines of the Marquis were of the best quality. The vine-dressers appreciated them, being connoisseurs.

Drunkenness led to renewed violence. Rushing into the greenhouses, which were kept up with marvellous care, these brutes tore down and trampled upon the plants and flowers, shattering the marble vases.

A beautiful Flora, by Pradier, was standing in a mass of verdure upon a low pedestal, at the foot of which gurgled a stream of clear water, falling later into a round basin of stone. A madman was threatening to disfigure her lovely face with a scythe, when another of the band, seized by a sudden access of sensibility, placed himself before the master-piece, declaring that he was a friend to the arts, and that he would thrust his pitchfork into the body of the first who should touch the statue. The Flora was saved.

Then, to compensate themselves, the Pont-Avesnois thought of setting up a Tree of Liberty. A young poplar was

quickly torn up from the park, and, after decorating it with red shreds, they proceeded, with howlings of joy, to plant it in the centre of the terrace.

Then they descended upon the town and continued their revolutionary orgies, shouting with all their might till nightfall. The following morning a brigade of gendarmerie arrived at Pont-Avesnes, and order was restored without difficulty.

On hearing of this rash enterprise, the Marquis began by laughing at it. Having showered his benefits upon the Pont-Avesnois, it appeared to him quite natural that they should try to injure him. But the act of planting the Tree of Liberty upon his terrace filled him with indignation.

This time the pleasantry appeared to him to have passed beyond all bounds. He gave orders to his gardener to up-root

the young poplar, to saw it into pieces of regular size, and to forward it to Paris for his own especial fuel. He sent five hundred francs to the Bacchanalian friend of master-pieces, and caused it to be declared to the Pont-Avesnois that, to punish them for their little Revolutionary farce, he would never again set foot in Beaulieu.

The Borough, to which this being put into quarantine was equivalent to a loss of twenty thousand francs a year, caused attempts at reconciliation to be made through the Mayor, tried a petition signed by the Municipal Council-board. Nothing was of use. The Marquis would not pardon the Tree of Liberty, and the Château of Beaulieu remained dull and empty.

It is true that the seductions of Parisian life were of some weight in the reso-

lution taken by the Marquis. His club, the theatres, sport and gallantry withdrew him more surely from Beaulieu than his rancour against his Peasants. However, at the end of a few years of this life of emotion and of pleasure, the Marquis became weary of his follies, and, profiting by an hour of wisdom, he married.

His young wife, a daughter of the Duc de Bligny, had a tender soul, and an equable mind. She adored the Marquis and knew how to close her eyes to his weaknesses. He was one of those charming prodigals to whom pleasure is the sole essence of life, and who has the hand and the heart always open; not knowing how to resist a single wish of his wife, but capable of letting her die of chagrin, quieting his conscience by bitterly weeping her loss. When the Marquise scolded him maternally the day after a too great

folly, he kissed her hands with tears in his eyes, saying: "Thou art a saint!" And the following day he would recommence his indiscretions.

The honeymoon of the young married people had lasted three years. This was very surprising on the part of such a man as the Marquis. From this union had sprung two children. A son and a daughter. Octave and Claire grew up with, and were educated by their mother. The heir solidly, and so as to become a useful man. The daughter delicately, so that she should one day become a charming wife and the delight of the man whom she might love. By a caprice of nature, the son was the living image of his mother, gentle, affectionate, and of a happy temperament; the daughter had the impetuous and ardent character of her father. Education may soften nature, but

cannot change it. As they advanced in age, Octave became the amiable young fellow that he promised to be. Claire the proud and haughty girl that her childhood had predicted.

However, a companion soon arrived to them, brought by misfortune and death. The Duc de Bligny, early left a widower, with a young child, died miserably upon the green turf of a racecourse, his back broken by a fall from his horse. This descendant of a noble race, who died like a jockey, had squandered all but a small fortune. His son Gaston, on leaving the funeral ceremony, was led clad in his mourning garb to the home of his aunt, the Marquise, where he remained.

Treated as a third child of the house, he grew up with Octave and Claire. Older than they were, he already bore the charm and the elegance of a refined race.

He had been neglected by his father, whose life of dissipation had totally unfitted him for the care of watching over his son. Sometimes given up to the servants, who initiated him into their intrigues of the lower story, sometimes taken by the Duke to his fast parties, and his digestion impaired by the seasoned dishes at the restaurants, the innocence of the boy, between the profligacies of the lackeys on one side, and the gallantries of his father on the other, had stood some rude shocks.

When he was brought to the Hôtel de Beaulieu, he was of a sickly constitution, low-spirited, and slightly doubtful as to his morals. In the pure atmosphere of family life, he regained all the grace, all the freshness of youth. At the age of nineteen, his studies ended, he promised to become a charming cavalier,

and an accomplished gentleman. It was at this period that he perceived that his cousin Claire, younger than himself by four years, was no longer a little girl.

A sudden transformation had been worked in her. Like a lovely butterfly bursting from its chrysalis, Claire had bloomed forth in all the splendour of her fair and radiant beauty. Her dark eyes sparkled with a gentle brilliancy, and her figure admirably developed, was of unparalleled elegance. Gaston adored her madly. It came upon him like a thunderbolt. For two years he had carefully concealed his secret in his own bosom.

A great misfortune caused him to speak. In grief, confessions come more readily from the heart. The Marquis de Beaulieu died suddenly. This joyous liver disappeared discreetly from life, *à l'Anglaise*. He was not ill, but he ceased to live.

They found him lying on the floor of his study. He had wished to peruse the documents relating to a law-suit that he was engaged in against his collateral relations in England. This unusual work had not succeeded with him.

The doctors who wish to determine everything with precision, and will not permit any one to act without their opinion, even to die, declared that the Marquis had succumbed to the rupture of an aneurism. His club friends shook their heads, and said that poor Beaulieu had ended like Morny, used up, worn out by his fast life. It is certain that one cannot lead with impunity the existence that the Marquis had led for twenty-five years.

The most intimate of his friends thought that the revelation made by his agent to this superb spendthrift,—that his capital was devoured to the last sou,—had killed

him as surely as if a ball had been lodged in his heart.

The relatives of the Marquis did not occupy themselves in seeking the cause of his sudden death; they only thought of weeping for him. M. de Beaulieu was as much loved and respected as if he had been a model husband and father. The Marquise, silently absorbed in her grief, clothed her whole household in mourning, and gave to him whom she had adored, notwithstanding his faults, and whom she bitterly regretted, princely obsequies. Octave, henceforth Marquis de Beaulieu, and the Duc de Bligny, his brother by adoption, led the funeral cortège, supported by the oldest Nobility of France. In the evening when they re-entered the Hôtel gloomy and silent, they found the Marquise and Claire clad in sombre black, awaiting them in order to console and

thank them for the sad and painful task that they had fulfilled. The Marquise then shut herself up in her room with her son to talk with him of the future. And Gaston went with Claire into the garden.

The lofty trees cast a dark shadow. It was a beautiful summer evening, the air heavy with the perfume of flowers. The two young people walked slowly and without speaking, around the greensward. They were thoughtful and sad. With one accord they paused and seated themselves on a stone bench. A jet of water was trickling into the marble basin at their feet, and its monotonous murmur lulled their reverie. Gaston suddenly broke the silence, and, speaking fast, like one who has too long restrained himself, expressed to Claire, with deep feeling, his grief at having lost the kind friend who had been

to him as a father. He was in a state of agitation that it was impossible to control. His nerves had been too cruelly shaken throughout the day. The weakness of his entire being abandoned him to the poignant emotion of the present hour. And, in spite of his efforts, he could not refrain from tears, and began to sob.

Then resting his head, heavy with grief, in the burning hands of Claire, he cried :

“I shall never forget what thy family has been to me. Whatever may befall me in this life, thou wilt always find me near thee,—I love thee so well !”

And he repeated between his sobs : “I love thee ! I love thee !”

Claire gently raised the head of Gaston, who was crimson, and almost ashamed of his outburst, and, regarding him affectionately, with a sweet smile :

“ I, also, I love thee ! ” said she.

“ Claire ! ” cried Gaston passionately.

The young girl placed her hand over his mouth, and, with the solemnity of a betrothal, lightly brushed his forehead with her lips. Then slowly they rose, and, leaning upon each other, resumed in silence their walk around the grass-plot. They thought no more of speaking. They were listening to their hearts.

The following day, Octave de Beaulieu began to read for the Bar, and Gaston entered the office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Republican Government sought at that time to attach to itself the great names of the Aristocracy, in order to reassure Europe, who saw with unquiet eyes the Democracy triumphant.

Launched into society, he produced a great sensation by the elegance of his

figure, the beauty of his face, and the charm of his conversation. He was much sought by the mothers of marriageable daughters, but remained indifferent to their advances. His eyes were blind to all but Claire; and his happiest evenings were those passed in the little salon of his aunt, gazing at his cousin working, her head bent over her embroidery. The light shone on the careless ringlets which fell over the nape of her white neck. Gaston sat silent and absorbed, devouring with his glance that golden hair, that he was longing to press passionately with his lips. At ten o'clock he took leave of the Marquise, clasped affectionately the hand of Claire, and went out into the world to dance till morning.

In the summer, the whole family flew away to Normandy, to an estate of the Marquise; for, faithful to the rancour of

her husband, she had not yet returned to Beaulieu. There Gaston was completely happy; he rode through the woods with Octave and Claire, intoxicated by the pure air, whilst the Marquise ransacked the family archives to find other documents relating to the law-suit in England.

It was a question of a considerable sum bequeathed to M. de Beaulieu by will. The English kinsmen had contested the legacy, and the solicitors of the two parties entered into the cause as rats into a cheese, enriching themselves by prolonging the hostilities. The law-suit that the Marquis had begun from self-love his widow had continued from interest, for the fortune of M. de Beaulieu was gravely compromised by his follies; and the heritage in England represented the greater part of the patrimony of her children.

The personal fortune of the Marquise was handsome, but it only sufficed for the heavy expenses of their ordinary life. Madame de Beaulieu had thus become a litigious woman,—although she had a horror of chicanery,—in order to defend the interests of Claire and of Octave; and, plunged in old dusty papers, in continual correspondence with lawyers, she had become strong on the subject of legal procedure.

She had absolute confidence in the result of the law-suit. Her family believed in her security, and Claire was considered as being able to take two millions to him who would be so happy as to please her. She had already been asked in marriage, and by aspirants of high birth and of large fortune. She refused them. The Marquise, disquieted, questioned her daughter; and Claire, without hesitation, informed her

mother that she was affianced to the Duc de Bligny.

Madame de Beaulieu was but moderately satisfied with this betrothal. Moreover, she had very decided ideas upon the marriage of cousins, and read Gaston with singular penetration. She saw him volatile, passionate, and inconstant, very capable of loving ardently, quite incapable of loving faithfully. She did not wish, however, to seek to influence her daughter, being acquainted with the strangely firm character of Claire, and knowing that nothing would induce her to break an engagement freely contracted. Besides, at the bottom of her heart the Marquise was flattered by an alliance which would again bring into the family the name of Bligny, that had been given up by herself at her marriage. Therefore she received her nephew kindly; and, not being able

to treat him better than she had done up to that time, continued to regard him as a veritable son.

Meanwhile the Duke was named Secretary to the Embassy at St. Petersburg; and, by mutual consent, it was resolved that the marriage should take place during the first leave of absence that the young diplomatist might obtain. That leave was given at the end of six months. Gaston went to Paris, but for eight days only. He was charged with a confidential mission, which the Ambassador had not been willing to risk transmitting by a despatch in cipher.

Eight days! Could one in conscience get married in eight days? There was not even time to have the banns regularly published. The young Duke was very fond of Claire, but with a shade of carelessness that formed a strong contrast

to his devoted tenderness of former times.

After leaving Paris, Gaston had been much in Russian society, the most corrupt in the world, and he returned with very peculiar ideas upon love. The expression of his face had altered in the same way as the sentiments of his heart. His features had grown marked and hard ; there was a trace of profligacy upon his forehead, formerly so clear. Claire did not or would not see these changes. She had vowed to the Duke an unalterable love ; and then she had confidence in his honour as a nobleman, and waited. Gaston's letters, at first frequent, grew more rare. They were always filled with passionate protestations. He professed to suffer cruelly on hearing of the delays which retarded his happiness ; but spoke no more of returning. And two

years had glided away since his departure.

At the request of her daughter, Madame de Beaulieu closed her salons during the two winters which had passed. The bride-elect desired to live in retreat, so as to avoid the solicitations of the aspirants who would not be discouraged. Octave continued his studies for the Bar, and the Marquise buried herself more and more in the dusty and ancient papers of her interminable lawsuit.

At the return of spring, by one of those caprices familiar to her, Claire wished to visit the estate of Beaulieu, that her father, during his life, had placed under an interdict. The Marquise, incapable of resisting the desire of her daughter, and thinking it prudent to divert her mind, consented to this removal.

And it is in this way that, one lovely day in the month of October, the young Marquis, quite recently received as a licentiate, was met, with his gun upon his shoulder, accompanied by his dark-brown spaniel, in the woods of M. Derblay.

CHAPTER II.

AT the hour when the young Marquis was returning heavily laden to the Château, Madame de Beaulieu and Claire were sitting in the grand salon, enjoying to the last the beautiful day. Through the large glass door opening upon the perron the sunlight entered in floods, causing to glitter in its rays the embrowned gold of the picture-frames, between the heavy borders of which their ancestors were depicted smiling or grave in their costumes of ceremony. The furniture, of the date of Louis XVI., in carved wood, painted white, and relieved by mouldings of sea-green, was covered with finely-worked tapestry, representing the Metamorphoses

of Ovid. A large, low screen, hung with Genoa velvet, surrounded the deep and cushioned easy-chair in which the Marquise had installed herself, knitting with great attention hoods of wool for the little children of the village.

Madame de Beaulieu had at this time passed her fortieth year. Her face, grave and sweet, was crowned with hair already almost white, giving to her a grand air of nobility. Her black eyes, full of melancholy, seemed yet humid from the secret tears that they had shed. Frail and slender, the Marquise had delicate health, and took all kinds of precautions. On this warm day, a large shawl was spread over her knees, protecting from the slightest air her small feet, that by a persistent coquetry she shod in black satin slippers.

Buried in a large arm-chair, her head

resting upon its tapestry-covered back, her hands hanging listless and inert, Claire, her eyes lost in the distance, gazed at, without seeing, the beautiful landscape displayed before her. She had been there an hour, silent, motionless, bathed by the sunshine, which made her golden hair glitter like the aureole of a saint.

For some instants the Marquise regarded her daughter with uneasiness. A sad smile played around her lips, and, to attract the attention of Claire, she purposely moved the basket that contained her balls of wool, accompanying this action by a little significant: "hem ! hem !" But the young girl, insensible to these indirect appeals, remained immovable, pursuing her thoughts with inexorable tenacity. The Marquise thwarted, laid her work upon the table, and, raising herself in her easy-chair, said,

with a slight accent of remonstrance :

“ Claire ! . . . Claire ! . . . ”

Mademoiselle de Beaulieu closed her eyes for a moment as if to say adieu to her dream, and without changing the position of her head, merely raising to the arms of her chair her beautiful white hands :

“ My mother ! ” answered she.

“ Of what art thou thinking ? ”

Claire was for an instant silent. The shadow of a frown passed over her forehead. Then making an effort, and with a calm air :

“ I was thinking of nothing, mother,” she replied ; “ this warm air has made me drowsy . . . Why did you call me ? ”

“ That thou mightst speak to me,” said the Marquise, with a shade of affectionate reproach, “ that thou shouldst not thus remain dumb and absorbed.”

There was a short silence. Claire had resumed her pensive attitude. The Marquise leaned forward, having thrown aside her shawl without thinking of the fresh air. Mademoiselle de Beaulieu turned slowly towards her mother her lovely sad face, and, as if continuing aloud the thoughts that had before silently occupied her :

“How long is it,” said she, “since we received letters from St. Petersburg ?”

The Marquise shook her head, seeming to say : I knew what was troubling her. And, in a voice that she tried to render calm : “About two months.”

“Two months !—yes !” repeated Claire with a sorrowful sigh.

This time the Marquise altogether lost her patience ; rising abruptly, she went to seat herself near the window, opposite her daughter, and taking her hand, said :

“Let us see, why dost thou incessantly think of that, only to torture in this way thy mind?”

“Of what should I think,” said Claire with bitterness, “if not of my betrothed? And how is it possible that I should not torture my mind, as you say, to find motives for his silence?”

“I own,” replied the Marquise, “that it is difficult to explain it. The Duc de Bligny, my nephew, after having passed eight days with us last year, left, promising to return to Paris in the winter. He at first wrote that political complications would detain him at his post. Then he pretended that the winter being over he would wait till the summer to return to France. Summer has come, but the Duke does not come. Here is the autumn, and Gaston makes no more excuses. He does not even take the trouble to write to us.

Let us admit that there has been on his part only negligence. It is already far too much ! My daughter, everything degenerates : the men of our world no longer know how to be polite."

And the Marquise proudly raised her white head, which gave her an air of resemblance to the family portraits of the great ladies with powdered hair, who were smiling all around the salon from their gilded frames.

"But if he should be ill?" hazarded Claire, drawn to defend him whom she loved. "If it were impossible for him to give us news?"

"It is inadmissible," replied the Marquise pitilessly; "they would have informed us from the Embassy. Be sure that he is in perfect health; that he is happy and joyous; and that throughout the

winter he has led the cotillon in the first circles of St. Petersburg.”

A nervous frown contracted the face of Claire. She turned pale, as if all the blood in her veins had flowed back to her heart. Then, forcing herself to smile :

“He had so often promised to spend the winter in Paris; and it would have been to me a *fête* to have found myself in our world with him! I should have triumphed in his success. He would, perhaps, have seen mine. You must own, my mother, that he is not jealous. Nevertheless, he has had reason to be so. Wherever we have gone, I have been much surrounded. Here, even in this desert of Beaulieu, it has not ceased, and our neighbour, the Ironmaster, has begun to ——”

“M. Derblay?”

“M. Derblay; yes, my mother. Last

Sunday at mass, — you did not remark it, you are too pious, — I was reading my prayers at your side, but, without knowing why, I felt myself troubled. A power stronger than my will drew my attention. In spite of myself I turned, I raised my eyes, and in the shadow of a chapel I saw M. Derblay bending.”

“He was praying.”

“No, my mother, he was looking at me. Our eyes met, and in his I read a mute prayer. I lowered my head and forced myself to turn no more to that side. On leaving I saw him in the porch waiting. He did not dare to offer me the holy water. He bowed profoundly, we passed, and I felt his eyes following me. It appears that it is the first time this year that he has been seen at mass.”

The Marquise rose, and returning to

her easy-chair on which she gently sank :

“Well! that will count towards the salvation of his soul. Instead of making soft eyes at thee, he would do well to indemnify us for the encroachment that he has made upon our boundaries. I find his dumb invocations a bad pleasantry. And thou must have much leisure to occupy thyself with the sighs of this beater of iron, who one of these mornings will deafen us with his hammers.”

“My mother, the attentions of M. Derblay are respectful, and I have no reason to complain of them. I only speak to you of the Ironmaster because he is one amongst others. In short, the heart of woman is changeable, they say . . . The Duke is not here to defend his own . . . And, for myself, the *rôle* of Penelope, awaiting perpetually the return of him

who does not come, may end by wearying me. Gaston ought to think of all that . . . But he does not. And I remain quite alone, patient, faithful . . . ”

“And thou art wrong!” cried the Marquise with vivacity. “If I were in thy place ——”

“No, my mother,” interrupted Made-moiselle de Beaulieu, with grave firmness, “I am not wrong, and I can claim no merit for acting as I do, for I love the Duc de Bligny.”

“Thou dost love him!” exclaimed the Marquise, not being able to dissimulate her irritation. “How thou dost always exaggerate! To make of the friendship of childhood a profound love; of the ties of relationship an indestructible chain! Gaston and thou grew up together. Thou hast fancied that this community of existence ought to be perpetual, and that

thou couldst not be happy without the Duke . . . Follies, all follies, my child ! ”

“ My mother ! ” cried Claire.

But the Marquise was launched, and the opportunity that had been offered to her to relieve her mind was too good for her to allow it to escape.

“ Thou hast great illusions with regard to the Duke. He is fickle, frivolous. He has, thou knowest it, habits of independence that he will not be able to correct. And I foresee many awakenings for thee in the future. Stay ! Wilt thou have the whole of my thoughts ? I should not see without inquietude this marriage take place ! ”

Claire sat upright. A bright colour flamed in her cheeks. The two women looked at each other a moment without speaking. It seemed that the first word pronounced between them would be of

exceptional gravity. Claire could not restrain herself, and, with a trembling voice :

“ My mother, this is the first time that you have spoken to me thus. It appears that you wish to prepare me to hear bad tidings. The absence of the Duke, can it be caused by serious reasons that you are hiding from me ? Have you learned ?——”

The Marquise was alarmed at seeing the violent agitation of her daughter. She understood better than ever how deep was the attachment of Claire. She saw that she had gone too far, and making a prompt retreat :

“ No, my child, I know nothing,” replied she. “ They have told me nothing. I even find that they have not said enough. And a silence so prolonged on the part of my nephew astonishes me . . . Truly it appears to me that Gaston indeed pushes a little far his diplomacy ! ”

Claire was re-assured. She attributed the outbreak of her mother to a discontent that she herself could hardly suppress. And forcing herself to resume her serenity :

“Now, my mother, let us still have a little patience . . . The Duke thinks of us, I am sure of it. And he intends to surprise us by arriving unexpectedly from St. Petersburg.”

“I wish it, my daughter, as thou desirest it. In any case, my nephew de Préfont and his wife will arrive here to-day. They are coming from Paris. Perhaps they will be better informed as to his movements than we are.”

“See, here is Octave returning by the terrace with Maître Bachelin . . . ” said Mademoiselle de Beaulieu quickly, rising with precipitation, desirous to escape from this painful conversation.

The young girl left the salon and advanced into the bright light. She was at this time twenty-two years of age and in the full splendour of her beauty. Her tall, erect figure was admirably proportioned.

She had superb shoulders, white and graceful arms, with the hands of a queen. Her golden hair, knotted upon the top of her head, exposed to view the creamy and rounded nape of her neck. Carelessly leaning, her hands resting upon the iron balustrade of the perron, playing absently with the blossoms of the climbing plants which had entwined themselves around it, she appeared the living embodiment of youth in its grace and vigour.

Madame de Beaulieu looked at her for a moment, admiringly. Then shook her head and sighed.

The steps of the arrivals were heard on

the gravel of the terrace, and their voices confusedly reached the salon.

Maître Bachelin was a little man of about sixty, rounded by the inactivity of his office life. His face very red under his white hair, scrupulously shaven, dressed in black, with a suspicion of white cuffs falling over his hands, he was the exact type of the notary of the *Ancien Régime*. Deeply attached to his noble clients, saying: "Madame la Marquise" with devout unction, he upheld the interests of the de Beaulieu family by hereditary right. The Bachelins were, from birth, the notaries of the Lords of the country. And the last of these respectable public officers was the proud possessor of a charter from the time of Louis XI., upon which was paraded the rude signature of the feudal Lord, the Marquis Honoré Onfroy, Jacques, Octave,

with the sign-manual ornamented by love-knots of Maître Joseph Antoine Bachelin, Notary to the King.

The return of the masters of Beaulieu to their Château had caused great joy to the worthy man. For him it was a re-entrance into grace. He had groaned over the absence of his noble clients. And having them again in this beautiful country, he hoped to see them resume their former habit of spending every summer on the estate. Jealous of making his knowledge appreciated, he had placed himself at the disposition of Madame de Beaulieu, in order to disentangle the confused threads of the law-suit in England. And for six weeks he had kept up with the solicitor an active correspondence which had set a match to the affair. In one month and a half, Maître Bachelin had done more work than all the counsels

of the Beaulieu family had achieved in ten years. And, notwithstanding the predictions of evil made by the clever man with regard to the result of the contest engaged in, the Marquise was enchanted with his assistance and amazed at his ardour. She discovered in him one of those devoted servants worthy of being elevated to the rank of friends. Consequently, she treated him as a friend.

Maître Bachelin, on his way to the Château, met the young Marquis at the iron gate of the park, and, seeing him heavily laden, forcibly took from him his gun, which he carried under his left arm, holding tightly under his right a bulky portfolio of black leather, stuffed with papers.

“Oh! how encumbered you are, my poor M. Bachelin!” said Claire gaily to the Notary, who was hurriedly ascending

the steps of the perron, attempting to raise his hat, and to make ceremonious bows.

“Will you accept my very humble respects, Mademoiselle? As you see, I am at this moment uniting the attributes of justice and of arms . . . The Code under one arm, the gun under the other . . . But the gun is under the left arm . . . *Cedant arma togæ!* A thousand pardons! without doubt you do not understand Latin, and I am only a pedant.”

“My sister, at least, understands so much Latin,” said the Marquis, laughing . . . “And you are the best man in the world . . . Now give me back my gun . . . Thanks! . . . ”

And taking it from the Notary, Octave followed him up the perron.

“Thou hast had good sport, it seems to me,” said Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, stopping her brother upon the threshold of

the salon, and raising the game-bag which weighed upon his shoulders.

“I shall be modest, and not adorn myself with the plumes of the peacock . . . This game was not killed by myself.”

“And by whom, then?”

“I do not know. Truly! . . .” added the Marquis, seeing his sister make a gesture of astonishment. “Picture to thyself that I was lost in the woods of Pont-Avesnes, when I met another sportsman, who made some observations to me, and asked who I was, with a commanding manner and in a peremptory tone. But as soon as he knew my name he became not only conciliating but even amiable, making me take, almost by force, the game that is in my bag.”

“How singular!” said Mademoiselle de Beaulieu. “Did this man wish to mock thee?”

“*Ma foi*, no! I do not think it. He seemed, on the contrary, anxious to be agreeable to me . . . And, his offering made, he escaped as fast as his legs could carry him, to prevent my refusing it.”

“Will Monsieur le Marquis permit me to ask him a question?” said Maître Bachelin, who had listened to the narrative with great attention.

“Ask it, I beg you, my dear Maître.”

“Well! what kind of man was the sportsman in question?”

“A tall, active fellow, very dark, wearing an old grey felt hat and a blouse.”

“Ah! ah! It is indeed he!” said the Notary, in a low voice. “It is in my power, M. le Marquis, to give you the name of your mysterious donor. It is simply M. Derblay.”

“Monsieur Derblay!” cried the Marquis, “muffled up in a blouse like a

peasant, and wearing a battered hat like a smuggler? Impossible!"

"Do not forget, M. le Marquis," replied Maître Bachelin with a smile, "that here we are rustic sportsmen. I, who have the pretension of showing myself decently dressed in ordinary life, if you were to meet me out shooting, in a corner of a wood, you would be afraid of me. It is M. Derblay, you may be sure of it. If I did not recognise him by the portrait that you have just sketched—which is striking,—the amiable offer that he made you would be sufficient to dissipate my doubts. It is certainly he."

"Then I have been polite! I told him, in speaking of himself, that he was a troublesome neighbour . . . and many other disobliging things. I must really go to make him my apologies."

"You will not have to take that trouble,

M. le Marquis, and if you will announce my visit to Madame your mother, I will, in her presence, make you acquainted with certain facts, which will modify, I am quite certain, the opinion you have formed of M. Derblay."

"*Ma foi!* I ask no better," said Octave, disencumbering himself of his game-bag and gun. "The Ironmaster has the air of a good fellow."

While speaking, the Marquis entered the salon, approached Madame de Beaulieu, and, having respectfully kissed her hand:

"Maître Bachelin is here, my mother, and wishes to see you."

"Why does he not enter?" said the Marquise with vivacity. "Here are ten minutes that I have heard you babbling upon the perron. Good day, my dear Bachelin . . ."

And as the Notary bent as low as his plump figure would permit :

“Do you bring me good news ?” added the Marquise.

The face of Bachelin changed its expression. From smiling it became overcast, and, evading the question put to him by his noble client, the Notary replied in a grave tone :

“I bring you news, yes, Madame la Marquise . . . ”

And, as if in haste to pass to another subject :

“I went this morning to Pont-Avesnes, and I have seen M. Derblay. All the difficulties which have arisen between you and himself, on the subject of your boundaries in common, are removed. My honourable friend accepts all the conditions that you may please to dictate. He is happy to place himself at your discretion.”

“But, if it be thus,” said Madame de Beaulieu, with slight embarrassment, “we have no conditions to dictate. When there is no conflict, there is neither vanquisher nor vanquished. The affair will be submitted to your arbitration, my dear Bachelin, and all that you do will be well done.”

“This is a resolution that enchants me, and I am happy to see peace re-established between the Foundry and the Château. There is, then, only to sign the preliminaries. With this aim, M. Derblay intends to present himself at Beaulieu with his sister, Mademoiselle Suzanne, to pay his respects to you, Madame la Marquise ; if, however, you deign to authorize it . . . ”

“Certainly ! Let him come ! I shall be very pleased to see him, this Cyclops who blackens the whole valley . . . Ah ! but

I suppose it is not only this treaty of peace which is thus swelling your portfolio," said Madame de Beaulieu, pointing to the case of the Notary. "You are, doubtless, bringing me some fresh documents relating to our law-suit in England?"

"Yes, Madame la Marquise, yes," answered Bachelin, with a more marked agitation. "If you are willing, we will speak of business . . ."

And with a supplicating look at the Marquise, the Notary glanced at her son and her daughter.

Madame de Beaulieu understood. A vague inquietude stirred her heart. What was there of so grave a nature that her confidential adviser should warn her that closed doors were necessary? But the Marquise was a woman of resolution. Her hesitation was of short duration, and turning to her son :

“Octave,” said she, “wilt thou see if orders have been given to go to the station to meet our cousins who will arrive at five o’clock?”

At these words, Claire raised her head. Her brother gave a start. The intention of the Marquise was evident. She sought a pretext to send away her son. There was between these three beings who loved each other so tenderly a mysterious pre-occupation that they mutually tried to conceal. Claire and the Marquis, without asking questions, smiled at their mother, and retired each in an opposite direction.

Mademoiselle de Beaulieu descended slowly to the terrace. The idea that Bachelin had brought news of the Duc de Bligny had suddenly come to her, and, profoundly moved, feeling her thoughts whirling rapidly in her brain without being able to seize one of them, she

walked under the tall trees, losing all sense of time, and plunged in a deep and anxious reverie.

In the salon, the Marquise and Bachelin were alone. The Notary made no more efforts to give a smiling expression to his face. He was grave and pre-occupied. Madame de Beaulieu kept silence for a moment, as if wishing to enjoy to the last minute the tranquillity that she still possessed. Then, taking a resolution :

“Well ! my dear Bachelin, what have you to tell me ?”

The Notary sorrowfully shook his head.

“Nothing good, Madame la Marquise,” replied he. “And it is to me, an old retainer of your family, a subject of great affliction. The result of the suit, begun in his life by the late Marquis de Beaulieu, your husband, against his collaterals in England, is gravely compromised.”

“You are not telling me the entire truth, Bachelin,” interrupted the Marquise. “If there were yet a shade of hope, you would not be so dejected. Speak, I am strong, I can hear all. Have the English Tribunals decided? Is the law-suit lost? . . . ”

The Notary had not the courage to answer. He made a gesture that was equivalent to the most desolating avowal. The Marquise bit her lips, a tear glistened on her eye-lashes, soon dried by the flush that mounted to her face. Bachelin, in consternation, began to walk hurriedly up and down the salon. He had forgotten all respect. He remembered no more the venerated place in which he was, and, carried away by his emotion, gesticulating as when studying a case in his office, he said :

“The cause was badly managed ! The

solicitors are asses ! and covetous ! They write you a letter, it is so much . . . You answer their letter, they read the answer, it is so much . . . If the Marquis had asked my advice earlier ! But he was in Paris ; and his lawyer directed it badly . . . They too are asses, these lawyers of Paris ! Fellows who only know how to drive a pen over stamped paper ! ”

He stopped abruptly, and striking his hands together : “ Here is a terrible blow for the House of Beaulieu ! ”

“ Terrible, indeed,” said the Marquise, “ and it causes the ruin of my son and of my daughter. At least ten years of economy will be necessary so that out of my fortune I may be able to retrieve our position . . . ”

Bachelin ceased to perambulate the salon. His calmness returned, and now he listened to Madame de Beaulieu with

pitying respect. He knew that the loss of the law-suit was irremediable, having just received the judgment. And no resource, no appeal was possible. The disdainful negligence of the Marquis had permitted his adversaries to gain serious advantages, and afterwards the struggle was indefensible.

“Misfortune rarely comes singly,” continued the Marquise. “You must have other bad news for me Bachelin. While I am here, tell me everything,” added Madame de Beaulieu with a resigned smile. “I do not think it possible to be more deeply wounded than I am.”

“I wish I could share that confidence, Madame la Marquise. The intelligence I have yet to give you does not appear to me so painful. But I am acquainted with the tenderness of your heart and I fear that of these two misfortunes

the loss of money will seem to you the least . . . ”

The Marquise turned pale, and an extreme agitation overcame her. She had a presentiment of that which her confidential adviser was about to tell, and, incapable of restraining herself:

“You have tidings of the Duc de Bligny?” exclaimed she.

“I was charged by you, Madame, to inquire into the life and actions of Monsieur your nephew,” said the Notary, with a shade of disdain very characteristic in this fervent worshipper of the aristocracy. “I followed exactly your instructions, and this is the information transmitted to me. M. le Duc de Bligny has been in Paris six weeks.”

“Six weeks!” repeated the Marquise with stupefaction. “And we ignorant of it!”

“Monsieur your nephew was careful to conceal it from you . . . ”

“And he has not come! He is not coming, though acquainted with the reverse that has befallen us! For he knows it; is it not true!”

“He has known it, Madame la Marquise, from the first!”

“Ah! you were right, Bachelin; this wounds me more cruelly than the loss of money. The Duke forsakes us. He has not come, and he will not come,—I had a presentiment of it. What he wanted from us was a fortune. The fortune has disappeared, the lover abandons us. Money is the pass-word of this epoch, mercenary and avaricious. Beauty, virtue, intelligence, none of these count! They do not say: ‘Place to the most worthy!’ they cry: ‘Place to the most rich!’ Now we are

almost poor, they will know us no more."

Bachelin heard with tranquillity the violent apostrophe of the afflicted mother. In spite of himself, the Notary could not dissimulate a secret satisfaction. He again became very red, and mechanically rubbed his hands behind his back.

"Madame la Marquise," said he, "I believe that you are calumniating our epoch. Certainly, positive ideas dominate it, and the natural cupidity of the human race has made notable progress. But you must not condemn in a lump all our contemporaries. There are still some disinterested men to whom beauty, virtue, and intelligence are qualities which make a woman enviable amongst all others. I do not say that I am acquainted with many of these men, but I know at least one, and of that kind one only suffices."

“What do you wish to say?” asked the Marquise wonderingly.

“Simply this,” pursued the Notary; “that an upright man, one of my friends, has not been able to see Mademoiselle de Beaulieu without becoming passionately enamoured. Believing her to be affianced to the Duke, he would not dare to make known his sentiments. But let her be free, and he will speak, if you deign to authorize it.”

The Marquise fixedly regarded Bachelin:

“It is of M. Philippe Derblay that you are speaking, is it not?”

“Yes, Madame la Marquise, of himself,” replied the Notary, intrepidly.

“I am not ignorant of the sentiments that my daughter has inspired in the ironmaster,” resumed the Marquise. “He does not sufficiently conceal them.”

“Ah! it is that he loves Mademoiselle

Claire, and sincerely," said the Notary, with spirit . . . "But you are not acquainted with M. Derblay, Madame la Marquise, and cannot judge of his worth."

"I am aware that he is highly esteemed in the country . . . But you, my dear Bachelin, you are intimate with his family?"

"I have known M. Philippe and his sister, Mademoiselle Suzanne, from their infancy. Their father called me his friend . . . This explains to you, Madame la Marquise, the boldness with which I have named to you the sentiments of M. Derblay. I hope that you will pardon me for it. In my eyes, my client has but one defect,—his name,—which is written in one single word without the prefix. But, in seeking well, who knows? The family is very old. In the Revolution, honest people shrank from each other: letters may easily have done the same."

“Let him keep his name as it is,” said the Marquise, sadly. “He bears it as a man of honour, and, in the days in which we live, that is sufficient. Look at the Duc de Bligny, who forsakes Claire when she is impoverished, then see M. Derblay, who seeks a girl without fortune, and tell me, which is the gentleman, the Noble or the Commoner?”

“M. Derblay would be very happy, Madame, if he heard you.”

“Repeat nothing to him that I have said to you,” interrupted gravely the Marquise; “Mademoiselle de Beaulieu cannot receive favours from any one. And with her disposition, it is probable that she will die unmarried. Please God, my friend, that the double blow about to strike her may find her strong and resigned.”

The Notary remained for an instant

speechless ; then, his voice trembling with emotion :

“ Whatever may happen, Madame la Marquise, remember that M. Derblay will be the most fortunate of men if he is ever permitted to hope. He will wait, for he is not one of those whose heart changes. I anticipate in these events many chagrins for us all, for you will permit me,—an old retainer of your family,—to count myself amongst those destined to suffer with you in your troubles. Now, if I may be allowed to advise, I would persuade you to say nothing to Mademoiselle de Beaulieu. The Duc de Bligny will, perhaps, return to his allegiance ; and, if not, it will then be time enough for Mademoiselle Claire to suffer.

“ You are right. As for my son, I ought to tell him of the misfortune that has struck us.”

And walking to the perron, the Marquise, with a gesture, called the young man, who, seated upon the terrace, was patiently awaiting the end of the conference.

“ Well ! ” said he with gaiety, “ is the sitting over ? or have you called me that I may sit with you ? ”

“ I wish,” gently replied the Marquise, “ to make thee acquainted with some grave intelligence, which causes me keen sorrow.”

The Marquis became serious in a moment, and, turning to his mother :

“ What is it, then ? ”

“ My son, Maître Bachelin has received a definite communication from our legal representative in England.”

“ On the subject of the law-suit ? ”

“ Yes.”

Octave drew near the Marquise, and, affectionately taking her hand :

“ Well,” said he, “ is it lost ? ”

The Marquise, amazed at seeing with what coolness her son received these disastrous tidings, gazed at Bachelin, as if asking for an explanation. But, seeing the Notary stand impassive, she glanced back at her son.

“ But thou didst know it, then ? ” exclaimed she, breathing more freely, as if relieved by the calm resignation of the Marquis.

“ I did not absolutely know it,” answered the young man ; “ but I suspected it. I did not wish to tell you, having too much respect for your illusions ; but I was perfectly convinced that this law-suit could not be defended. Also, for some time, I have been prepared for its loss. I only feared it for my sister, whose dowry was at stake. But there is a very simple way of arranging that. You will give her the

share in your fortune that you are reserving for me. And, as for myself, do not be troubled. I shall do very well."

At these generous words the Marquise reddened with pride. And turning to the Notary :

"Of what can I complain," said she, "having such a son?" and, extending her arms to the Marquis, who was affectionately smiling :

"Thou art a good child! Come, that I may embrace thee!"

"I deserve no praise, said the Marquis, with emotion. "I love my sister, and I will do all that is possible to make her happy. And now that we are speaking of these sad subjects, is it not your opinion that the silence of our Cousin de Bligny is connected with this lost law-suit?"

"Thou art mistaken, my child," quickly said the Marquise, making a movement

as if to restrain her son . . . “ And the Duke ? . . . ”

“ Oh, fear nothing, my mother ! ” interrupted Octave, with scornful pride. “ If Gaston hesitates to keep his engagement, now that Mademoiselle de Beaulieu can no longer present herself to him with a million in each hand, we are not the kind of people, I think, to take him by the collar and force him to respect his word. And, as things now are, I consider that, if the Duc de Bligny does not marry my sister, it will be so much the worse for him and so much the better for her.”

“ Well said, my son,” cried the Marquise.

“ Well said, M. le Marquis,” added Bachelin. “ And, if Mademoiselle de Beaulieu is no longer rich enough to tempt a hunter of dowries, she will always be perfect enough to captivate a man of heart.”

With a glance, the Marquise imposed silence on Bachelin; and he, happy at seeing a crisis that had seemed to him about to become terrible end so favourably, having taken leave of his noble clients, started with all the swiftness of his legs,—already stiffening with years,—on the road to Pont-Avesnes.

CHAPTER III.

IT was indeed M. Derblay, as Bachelin affirmed, that the Marquis had encountered dressed like a poacher, in the woods of Pont-Avesnes. Leaving Octave to call after him, he rushed across the wood, in a straight line, not heeding the whip-like blows of the branches nor the clutches of the brambles. He was laughing nervously, murmuring words interrupted by exclamations, profoundly joyous at the chance that had drawn him nearer to her whom he adored as one adores a young queen, from a distance and as a dream.

He descended the hill that led to the valley, devouring the ground with his long

legs, unconscious of the rapidity of his walk which brought drops of moisture to his forehead. He was following his thoughts that flew swiftly as with wings. When the Marquis should know with whom he had conversed, for he would certainly end by knowing it, he would feel gratified by the courtesy his "troublesome neighbour" had shown him. And who knows? There might perhaps follow a reconciliation. And he would see in her own home that adorable Claire, whose sweet face smiled perpetually in his memory. He might speak to her. It seemed to him that his words would be stifled in his throat, and that he would be dumb before her, overwhelmed by his emotion. Then, taking refuge in some dark corner of the salon, from whence he could regard her at pleasure, in gazing at her he would forget himself and be happy.

Happy ! And how ? To what could this mad passion lead him ? To assist as a friend at the marriage of her whom he ardently desired. For he was certain that the Duc de Bligny would return to her.

How could a man loved by such a woman, how could he be mad enough to neglect her ? And if it were not the Duke, another aspirant would present himself, a brilliant nobleman, having only to appear and to give his name to be welcomed with open arms. While he, the commoner, would be repulsed with scornful coldness.

A profound sadness stole over him at that thought. His pace slackened and languished. He no longer hastened towards Pont-Avesnes, fleeing like a wild animal through the lofty trees. But walked with slow steps, mechanically plucking leaves from the lower branches, and crushing them between his fingers.

What a misfortune was his not to be able to aspire to the possession of that idolised creature! And, pensive, he stopped at the foot of an oak. His back leaning against the trunk of the tree, without thinking of seating himself, he stood dreaming, his face grave and pale, his eyes moistened by the cruel anguish of his heart.

He recalled to memory all that he had done in his life, and asked himself if the tasks accomplished had not rendered him worthy of every happiness. After a brilliant course of study at the *Ecole Polytechnique*, he left as head pupil and chose the profession of mining. At the moment that he was about to be appointed engineer, the war broke out. He was at that time twenty-two years of age. Without hesitation, he enrolled himself as a Volunteer and departed in one of the

regiments of the Army of the Rhine. He assisted at the sanguinary reverse of Frœschwiller, and returned to the camp at Châlons with the remnant of the first Army corps. Then, participating in the disastrous march upon Sedan, the evening of the battle saw him a prisoner of war, guarded by Prussian Uhlans. But he was not of a character to allow himself to be taken thus, and, stealing away in the darkness, he profited by the obscurity of the night to cross the German lines. Entering Belgium, he only took time to arrive at Lille, and there joined one of the regiments then forming.

The war continued. Slowly and surely, he had seen the invasion spread over the country like a gangrene. Distinguished by General Faidherbe, he made, with him, the campaign of the North. Wounded by a gun-shot at Saint-Quentin, he lay six

weeks in the hospital, between life and death, and was awakened from his long torpor to shudder on hearing that Paris was in the hands of the Commune.

His convalescence spared him the terrible obligation of firing upon his fellow countrymen. And he returned to his paternal home, still suffering from his wounds, but wearing upon his breast the ribbon of the Legion of Honour, which had been brought to him while lying upon his bed at the hospital, by his General himself.

A keener pain than all that he had undergone in so short a time, awaited him at home. He found the household in mourning. His mother had died in his absence, leaving, deprived of her loving care, the little Suzanne, aged only seven years. Her father, M. Derblay, compelled to quit Pont-Avesnes on account of the

immense business which claimed his presence, had left the child under the guardianship of servants. The arrival of Philippe redoubled her grief and tears. Little Suzanne clung to her brother with the convulsive tenderness of a child abandoned to the terrors of loneliness. She clasped her arms around him, like a poor little weak being begging for protection and help. Philippe, simple and tender-hearted, adored this young sister who so much needed affection and who had lately found herself between a father entirely absorbed by his affairs, and servants faithful and devoted to her, but incapable of those delicate tendernesses, which are more necessary even than material attentions to the lives of women and of children.

He must, however, leave her and again get into harness. This departure was a

heart-rending grief to Suzanne; and the farewells that she said to Philippe renewed the despair that had overwhelmed her at the death of her mother.

But destiny decided that the separation should not be for long. Six months later, M. Derblay, struck down by excess of work, in his turn died, leaving Philippe and Suzanne alone in the world.

New duties were immediately imposed on the young man. The liquidation of the paternal enterprises was very complicated and fertile in painful surprises. M. Derblay, a man of remarkable intelligence, had a grave defect: he undertook more than he could possibly complete. He wasted his energies in different affairs, without being able to succeed in carrying them all out with equal success. The loss of one absorbed the gain of the other. He was incessantly invaded by a flood of

ever-increasing difficulties that he surmounted momentarily by dint of skill and vigour, but which would assuredly swallow him sooner or later. He quitted the world before the catastrophe, leaving a most perplexing and entangled inheritance.

Philippe had before him a splendid career fully traced out. He might have abandoned the enterprises of his father, paid off his debts as far as possible, and then have followed his own path. But that would have been ruin. All the paternal resources must pass away to save the name, and his sister would remain without a fortune. The young man did not hesitate. He renounced his future, sent in his resignation, and, loading his shoulders with the heavy burden under which his father had succumbed, became an Ironmaster.

The task had been rude. There was a little of everything in the inheritance of M. Derblay: glass-works at Courtalin, a foundry in the Nivernais, slate-quarries in the Var, and the iron-works of Pont-Avesnes. Philippe threw himself headlong into the gulf, striving to collect the scattered wrecks. He was an intrepid worker, and, during six years, gave his days and the greater part of his nights to the labour so valiantly undertaken. All the ready money that was found, he employed in putting his affairs into order. Then, in proportion as impulse was at first restored to them and prosperity afterwards, he yielded them up, keeping only the iron-works, of which he understood the great value.

In seven years, he had cleared the paternal heritage, and now had no more than the Foundry of the Nivernais, that

he worked equally with the iron-works of Pont-Avesnes, making use of the iron from the one to maintain the produce of the other. Being now out of danger and master of his affairs, he felt himself capable of extending them considerably. Adored in the country, he might become a Candidate and be nominated a Deputy. Who could know? That elevation is of a nature to please a woman. And then industry also is a power in this money-loving age.

Little by little hope again sprang up in his heart, and continuing his walk, he soon emerged from the woods. The grassy meadows of the valley were spread out upon the right. To the left, lay the first beds of brown rock forming the foundation of the hill. In these layers the passages to the mine were bored. A small railway, used for conveying the

ore in a direct line to the iron-works, ascended by a gentle slope to the galleries.

Philippe, abruptly torn from his meditations, resolved to cast a glance over the workings, and, turning aside, took the road to the mine. Upon a small round hillock stood the hut of the foreman charged with registering the loaded trucks. Philippe was going thither. As he drew near he thought he heard screams. At the entrance of the galleries there was an unusual agitation. The Ironmaster, quickening his steps, in a few minutes was on the spot, and able to ascertain the cause of the unprecedented uproar.

A fall of earth, caused by infiltrations of water, had just taken place on the siding of the railway. Some trucks were overturned, and, at the foot of the slope, a heap of gravel and of fallen beams had overwhelmed the conductor, a boy of

fifteen. A few workmen, and many women, who had hurried up from the village, formed an animated group, in the midst of which wept and gesticulated a distracted woman.

Philippe, thrusting aside the bystanders, quickly entered the circle.

“What has happened?” cried he with uneasiness.

“Ah! M. Derblay!” exclaimed the woman, increasing her violence, and redoubling her lamentations at the sight of the Ironmaster. “It is my poor lad, my little Jacques, who has been buried under that earth, with his truck, for three-quarters of an hour!”

“And what has been done to rescue him?” interrupted Philippe, turning hastily to the miners.

“We have cleared away as much as we could, Patron, said an overlooker, point-

ing to a large excavation ; “ but they dare no longer touch the supports. A hasty movement might bring them all down, and the boy would surely be crushed . . . ”

“ It is ten minutes since he last spoke to us,” cried the mother in despair ; “ now we hear him no more. He is certainly suffocated. Ah ! My poor little lad ! Are they going to leave thee there ? ”

And the wretched mother, bursting into sobs, fell overwhelmed by grief upon the grassy slope.

Quickly putting his gun into the hands of the miners, M. Derblay, throwing himself flat upon the ground, his head over the edge of the excavation, and under the timbers, which were crossing each other, listened anxiously. The silence in the bed of gravel, where the boy was lying, was as that of the grave.

“ Jacques ! ” called M. Derblay, whose voice sounded hollow and lugubrious under the mass of earth and wood ; “ Jacques ! dost thou hear me ? ”

A groan answered him, and, at the end of an instant, words feeble and broken reached his ears :

“ Ah, Patron ! . . . It is you ! Ah ! my God ! If you are there, then I am saved ! ”

This simple confidence deeply moved Philippe, who resolved to attempt even the impossible, so as to realize the hope of the boy.

“ Canst thou move ? ” continued he.

“ No,” murmured he, breathless and almost suffocated ; “ and I think my leg is broken.”

These words, heard in the midst of a death-like silence, drew from the bystanders a low groan.

“Have no fear, my boy; we will get thee out,” said Philippe. And, standing erect:

“Go, you others, bring crow-bars, and raise this timber,” said he to the workmen, pointing to a long beam deeply embedded in the earth, and forming, as it were, a natural lever.

“It cannot be done, Patron,” replied the overlooker sorrowfully, shaking his head. “All would fall. There is only one way of proceeding: it would be for three or four strong men to creep into the hole that we have begun to dig, and attempt to disengage the boy, as he is no longer able to move. During this time, we can encourage them by shouting; but it is a frightful risk; and there is every fear that they will stay there.”

“That is of no consequence; we must do it,” said the Ironmaster, looking reso-

lutely at his workmen. And, as they all stood motionless and silent, the colour rushed to his face.

“If one of you were down there, what would he think of his companions who left him to die? But, as not one of you dares to go, it is I who will do it.”

And, bending his tall form, Philippe glided under the rubbish. A cry of admiration and of gratitude rose from the crowd; and, as if it only needed his example to restore to these brave fellows their courage, three men followed the Ironmaster, whilst all the assistants, uniting their strength, supported on their backs the beams, raising them by incredible efforts.

There was again silence. Only the sobs of the grief-stricken mother, and the laboured respiration of the rescuers, crushed under the weight of earth, could be heard.

A few minutes, long as centuries, passed, during which the lives of five men were at stake; then there was a shout of joy. Soiled by the earth, with hands and shoulders wounded by their exertions, the four men emerged from the hole, Philippe, the last, bearing in his arms the fainting boy.

There was a horrible cracking, and the supports, relinquished by the workmen, again fell into the cavity, now empty of its prisoner. The mother, half wild, was divided between anxiety for her child and gratitude to the Ironmaster. The crowd, agitated, silent, respectfully surrounded the rescuer and the rescued.

“Now carry this boy to his home,” said M. Derblay gaily; “and let one of you summon the doctor.”

Then, brushing the earth from his clothes, and taking his gun, Philippe

again started in the direction of Pont-Avesnes.

The news of the rescue followed closely the report of the accident ; and, on arriving at the iron gate of the Château, Philippe saw his sister, escorted by Bachelin, advancing towards him. Suzanne, perceiving her brother, hastened to meet him. She was wearing a light gown, and balanced on her shoulder a large, red sun-shade, which, on that bright October day, usefully shaded her charming face. Mademoiselle Derblay was seventeen years old ; her sweet and happy face had a charming expression of trust and sincerity. Her brown eyes laughed yet more than her lips. Not regularly beautiful, she had a tender and innocent grace, that made her irresistibly attractive. In her impatience, she began to run towards M. Derblay, dropping her sun-shade, and

extending her arms, ready to throw herself upon his neck.

“Do not touch me!” cried Philippe, recoiling from the young girl; “I am covered with mud; I shall spoil thy gown!”

“Of what importance is that!” cried Suzanne in a transport of joy. “Oh! I will embrace thee! Thou hast saved the boy! Oh! my Philippe, it is always thee that they seek when there is any thing grand or good to be done!”

And taking between her hands the brown head of her brother she kissed it tenderly. Bachelin, distanced in the race by Suzanne, arrived out of breath.

“Well! my dear friend,” exclaimed the Notary, “again a good action . . .”

“Do not speak of it, I pray you,” interrupted Philippe smiling, “it is really not worth the trouble. The gravest part

of the affair is that I fear the boy is injured. Thou wilt do well to go as far as his house with thy medicaments, Suzanne. And if there should be any expenses, thou wilt provide for them."

"I will go, my brother," said the young girl. "I shall take Brigitte with me, shall not I?"

"Without doubt. And we, my dear Maître, will walk up to the house," added Philippe, turning to Bachelin. "I am looking like a vagabond, and must go and change."

Suzanne went in the direction of the offices of the Château, Philippe and the Notary crossed the vast square court planted with old lime-trees, in the centre of which a large rectangular pond, surrounded by beds of flowers, cast up into the air a jet of water, falling in cascades of fine spray, chased by the wind and rainbowed

by the sun. This basin is the last vestige of the immense body of water that at an earlier period formed a girdle about the Château. The Avesnes had been diverted from its course and forced into the moats by the ancient Lords of Pont-Avesnes. Under Louis XIII., a barrier was constructed to prevent the entrance of the water, and the moats were drained. The mud lying at the bottom, mixed with vegetable mould conveyed thither with much trouble and expense, made a soil marvellously fertile, in which grew the fruit-trees that to this day are the wonder of Pont-Avesnes. There are some pear and peach-trees nearly two hundred years old, and that produce rare and splendid fruit, unique in our country. These large moats, whose walls serve as espaliers, are like forcing-pits, into which the sun pours down his burning rays. The heat there

is as great as in a hot-house. And the bitter winds of Winter cannot penetrate to blast and wither the tender shoots and early blossoms.

The Château is built upon a foundation of brown sandstone, which raises it and gives it elegance. But it is black and gloomy. Its tall roofs of slate are depicted darkly against the sky. Philippe having decided to confine himself to one wing of the vast and cold dwelling, the remaining apartments are closed. And without the care of Brigitte, the foster-sister of Suzanne,—who, in spite of her youth, thanks to a fortunate precocity, fulfils with authority the duties of housekeeper,—the Château would be entirely neglected.

But the active Jurassienne, animating by her zeal the three domestics under her orders, makes, twice a month, a complete inspection, keeping in good order the

beautiful furniture, of the time of Louis XIV., which ornaments the reception-rooms.

When Brigitte opens the shutters of the grand salon and the light floods into the lofty and spacious room, it is as if the curtain of a theatre had been raised, showing decorations marvellous in their richness. The walls are hung with the most beautiful tapestry of the Gobelins, unfolding the entire history of Alexander. The large chairs in all the pomp of their backs of Genoa velvet between the gilded wood of their solemn arms. The grand Venetian mirrors reflecting, for a few minutes, in their faceted panels, the flowers of the garden, the capricious jet of water, and a small corner of the sky. Brigitte passes in with an active step, carrying a feather brush and a broom. Then, the sweeping and dusting at an

end, the shutters are re-closed and the artistic riches of the Château fall again into obscurity.

In the inhabited wing, Philippe had reserved for himself on the ground floor a large study surrounded by bookcases, the elevated shelves of which could only be reached by the aid of a ladder on wheels. In the centre, a writing-table, with papers heaped upon it in a disorder more apparent than real. A very beautiful inkstand in bronze, representing two chubby-cheeked loves fighting. The conqueror is laughingly pressing into the mouth of the conquered a bunch of grapes. Upon the chimney-piece is a handsome clock in the first style of Boule, of ebony inlaid and incrustated with brass. Next the study, the dining-room, severely fitted up with old furniture in carved pear-tree. Upon the sideboard, rich and solid silver, never

used. On the other side, a small salon, furnished in the most modern and the most *Bourgeoise* fashion. Hangings of blue poplin, and the furniture covered with the same stuff; a clock and fire-dogs of rough workmanship; a small table in marquetry, upon which some embroidery-work seems to announce the return of Suzanne. In two large panels, the portraits of M. and Madame Derblay are suspended, executed with more conscientiousness than talent, by a mediocre pupil of Flandrin.

On the first story, two large chambers, communicating by their dressing-rooms, the one occupied by Philippe, the other by Suzanne. The former, grave and sombre, hung with dark brown stamped velvet, and furnished in black wood, having for its sole ornament a trophy of modern arms, in the midst of which one would

remark a can belonging to the Infantry, pierced by three balls, a souvenir of Pont-Noyelles. The other room, virginal and fresh, like her who owns it. White muslin over blue, tied by rose-coloured knots. Furniture in white lacquer, relieved by stripes of blue; and all the little trifles that adorn so prettily the room of a young girl. From her window Suzanne could see the dark alleys of the park losing themselves in the distant verdure. She might muse there at her ease, if musing could sadden for a single instant the happy gaiety of her careless youth.

It was to his dressing-room that Philippe, after seeing his sister disappear, conducted Bachelin. Suspecting that the Notary had come from Beaulieu, like all lovers, he was impatient to know the details, important or trivial, that his

old friend never failed to bring him after each of his interviews with the noble inhabitants of the Château. But this day Bachelin did not appear in a humour for talking; and, seated in an arm-chair, he absently regarded the Ironmaster, who had planted himself before him like a note of interrogation. Philippe could no longer restrain himself, and frankly approaching the subject :

“Have you imparted to Madame de Beaulieu my proposition respecting an arrangement,” said he with affected calmness.

“Without doubt.”

“Well, did she find it sufficient and acceptable ? ”

“Perfectly.”

“And have you also offered my shooting ? ”

“Why should I ? ” rejoined the Notary

tranquilly, casting a mocking glance at the Ironmaster.

“What do you mean? Why should you?” cried the latter astonished.

“*Dame!*” replied Bachelin, “I did not make that offer, as you made it yourself this morning to the Marquis, and in the most romantic fashion.”

Philippe reddened a little, and looked down embarrassed.

“Ah! M. de Beaulieu has spoken to you of our meeting?” said he. “But he did not know with whom he was conversing.”

“I told him. Was it also necessary to tell him that you so well filled his game-bag through love for his sister?”

“My friend!”

“Ah! Ah! Are you thinking of drawing back?” asked Bachelin gaily.

“Do you no longer love Mademoiselle de Beaulieu?”

“More than ever! for it is a great folly,” replied Philippe. “How can I, a man of work, who has lived for so long a time out of the world, how can I think of that young girl, so beautiful, so proud, and, through that, perhaps, even more seductive? I saw her, grave, thoughtful, a little uneasy, without doubt, at knowing her lover to be far from her. And, in spite of myself, without thinking of it, I grew to love her. I forgot the distance which separates her from me, I did not see the difference in our origin. The voice of reason, the counsels of experience,—I listened to nothing but the love which was irresistibly singing in my heart. Ah! my old friend, I am ashamed of myself, but I cannot resist this mad passion which makes me feel an unknown joy, an exquisite intoxi-

cation . . . which gives me everything, in fact, save hope ! For there my blindness stops ; I do not hope, I give you my word."

" You do not hope, that is understood," said Bachelin lightly ; " but, in fine, you love. Here is so much gained. I was then right, is it not true, in speaking as I did to the Marquise ? "

" In speaking ? " stammered Philippe, very troubled . . . " How ! . . . in speaking ? But what did you say ? "

" Well ! That which you think, that which you have just expressed to me, in language as impassioned as persuasive."

The Ironmaster recoiled a step, his eyes sank under their brows, and became black. Biting his lip, and in a voice that he forced himself to render calm :

" But did I ask you," said he, " to make such confidences to Madame de Beaulieu ? "

“No, it is true, you did not ask me to do it,” replied Bachelin with composure. “But, *ma foi*, I found the occasion good, and I did not hesitate . . . Do you see ! There is nothing like having a clear position. You would still have played the fool for many weeks, perhaps months ; you would have plunged deeper than before into this love adventure. It was better to tell all at a good time, risking a repulse with *hauteur*. These are the reasons that determined me. Do they not seem to you to be of weight ?”

Philippe kept silence, as if he had hardly heard Bachelin. His ideas whirled confusedly in his brain, he had lost all sense of his own identity. It seemed to him that he had been carried by a rapid movement through boundless space. The air whistled in his ears, and his eyes could not fix themselves. He saw as through a

fog. And, in his aching brain, a persistent voice, which fatigued it horribly, repeated, like a vague revelation of the future: "Claire! If she is going to be thine!"

The voice of Bachelin aroused him from his torpor.

"Well! why do you regard me thus with bewildered eyes?" said the Notary. "You look like a Seer!"

Philippe passed his hand over his forehead as if to efface a painful impression, then, smiling at his friend:

"Pardon me. I was troubled at the thought that you had played such a high game without first warning me. I did not think you in the mood to do it. Otherwise I should have begged you to keep silence. Since the day when I was weak enough to own to you my love for Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, I have never ceased to regret

having so indiscreetly spoken. But it seems that when one loves the heart is too contracted to keep within itself all the tenderness that it contains, and, in spite of oneself, more escapes than is prudent. Avowals mount to the lips, and it is impossible to stop them. Hardly had I spoken to you when the illusion was dissipated, and the pitiless truth appeared to me. Mademoiselle de Beaulieu has never done me the honour to perceive that I exist. She is rich, affianced to her cousin, she will be a Duchess. And I must be a veritable madman to love her. Also I deserve a chastisement, and I am ready to submit to it. Tell me all, begin, do not break it to me."

"Well! I will tell you at first that Mademoiselle de Beaulieu is no longer rich, that she will probably never become a Duchess, and that an honourable man,

such as yourself, will never have a better chance of being accepted by her than at this moment."

At these words, Philippe became so pale that he seemed about to swoon. He gave an exclamation of joy. And, his limbs yielding through emotion, the young man fell back into a chair.

"Oh! take care! Do not give me hope. It would be too hard to renounce it later!"

"Well, yes; I can give you hope," continued Bachelin, "and in doing so I am betraying for your sake all the secrets of the de Beaulieu family. But you have so much interest in being discreet that it is not you who will repeat that which I am about to tell you."

And as Philippe seized his hands, fastening upon the face of the Notary, his eyes burning with anxiety:

“Mademoiselle de Beaulieu is ruined through the loss of the law-suit in England,” said Bachelin, “and she is ignorant of it. The Duc de Bligny has been in Paris six weeks forgetting her, and she does not suspect it. The day when Mademoiselle Claire shall learn that she is forsaken, there will arise in her heart a terrible tempest. And those who may be within reach will be able to collect much wreckage!”

“Ruined and forsaken!” cried Philippe, “That charming young girl, that adorable woman! What need has she of fortune? The only treasure that one would ask of her, is herself!”

“Yes, certainly! And it is exactly under that aspect of pure disinterestedness that I have shown you.”

“Oh! tell it again!” cried Philippe with fire, “tell it to Madame de

Beaulieu and to herself, I implore you ! ”

Then, pausing as if saddened by a despairing thought :

“ But no, ” continued he, “ tell her nothing. She is proud and haughty. The idea that she might owe some obligation to the man who will be her husband would keep her from me and determine her to repulse me. Inform the Marquise, make her understand my scruples, and above all place me in treaty with her. Oh ! I should receive the hand of Mademoiselle de Beaulieu on my knees. But I wish that she may think herself still rich, so that she might accept or refuse me freely. And should I, in marrying her, endow her with all that I possess, she would still be doing me a favour ! ”

“ There ! there ! ” exclaimed Bachelin, interrupting Philippe by an affectionate

gesture. "You travel too fast! How beautiful are youth and passion! But you must go by a more moderate train. The question at this moment is only that of presenting yourself at the Château. For want of other satisfaction, you will have that of contemplating the object of your desires, as they said in the last century. Be grave and calm. Conduct yourself with the discretion that your situation demands, and take with you Mademoiselle Suzanne. She will be of use as a screen, they will occupy themselves with her, and, during that time, you will become composed."

"And when must we go to Beaulieu?" asked Philippe visibly troubled.

"Ah! that is it! You are already afraid before you have even taken a step! Well! Go to-morrow. A good night's rest will restore your self-command; you will

make the most of your opportunities and of your advantages."

And, rising slowly, the Notary took his portfolio, placed it under his arm and moved towards the door. Then, stopping in the centre of the dressing-room :

"Do you still regret that I spoke to Madame de Beaulieu without your sanction?" asked he, regarding the Ironmaster with a keen and mocking glance. "It is true that, in your agitation, you have not asked for her reply?"

"It is true!" cried Philippe.

And by a sudden change, his mood, from joyous, became grave.

"What did she say?"

"All that she ought to say in a similar case,—namely, that *she* had nothing to say, and would not constrain Mademoiselle Claire. In fact, the usual things. But,

believe me, the strength of the position that you have to carry is not on the side of the mother, but on that of the daughter. Therefore take courage. And now I must go away to dinner."

And, affectionately shaking the hand of the Ironmaster, Bachelin left the room.

Philippe, when alone, fell into deep thought. He coolly looked his situation in the face, and was able to own to himself that it was not bad. Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, unworthily betrayed by her lover, would remain in the depths of the Jura for at least a few months, to allow time to pass over her humiliating disaster. There, he could see her, and, by surrounding her with discreet attentions, might, perhaps, arrive at not being displeasing to her. Suzanne would surely be a useful auxiliary. Instead of sending her back to

the convent at Besançon when the holidays were ended, he would keep her at home. She might become the companion of Claire, and win her love by her artless grace and tenderness. By degrees, she would instil the thought of her brother into the heart of Mademoiselle de Beaulieu.

And, his dream taking the appearance of reality, Philippe pictured to himself, walking slowly, under the lofty trees of Pont-Avesnes, the two young girls,—side by side, with arms linked like sisters, the one tall and proud, the other delicate and gentle. He gazed at them; he seemed surrounded by the perfume emanating from them. That delicious odour intoxicated him, and he was about to touch them, when suddenly a fresh mouth, pressing a kiss upon his forehead, aroused him from his dream; and the dear voice of Suzanne murmured in his ear :

“Of whom art thou thinking, Philippe?”

As the Ironmaster kept his seat, gazing at her with a vague smile, without answering :

“Thou wilt not tell it? Must I, then, speak? Well, let us wager that thou art thinking of a beautiful fair girl!”

Philippe rose abruptly, and, seizing the hand of his sister :

“Suzanne!” cried he.

But, under the mischievous glance of the young girl, he lost countenance, and could not continue. He stood stupefied, asking himself by what strange penetration that child had known how to divine so readily that which was passing within him.

“There, thou art quite troubled,” continued Suzanne with tenderness. “Thou didst believe, then, that thy secret was well hidden? But for the last month

thou hast not been the same, and it did not require much ingenuity to perceive that thy heart was no longer mine alone. Oh ! I am not jealous ! No ; I love thee too well for jealousy. And when I see thee pensive and absorbed, if I am disquieted, it is not because I fear that thou wilt take from me a part of thy affection, to give it to another, but that I am afraid thou mayst have chagrin. I owe thee so much, my Philippe ! It is thou who hast sheltered me, cherished me, brought me up, when I was alone, without father or mother. And it seems to me that I am not only thy sister, but thy daughter, the child of thy cares and of thy troubles. Go, love and be loved ! Thou wilt only see me rejoice ; for I do not know of happiness complete enough on this earth to recompense a being so perfect as thou art."

Tears sprang into the eyes of the Ironmaster, and ran silently down his face. The loving words of his sister had relaxed his over-excited nerves. He felt greatly moved, and, leaning against the high chimney-piece, stood, regarding Suzanne, who smiled at him.

“Now thou art weeping!” said she.
“Tell me, is it, then, sad to love?”

“Never speak more of these follies!” interrupted Philippe, in an altered tone.

“Follies! And why not? What woman, being acquainted with thee, would not desire to please thee?”

Then, placing herself before him, her expression daring, and her gesture resolute: “Listen; I will say, if it be necessary, to her whom thou lovest: ‘Mademoiselle, you are wrong in not adoring my

brother; for there is not a man in this world to whom he is not absolutely superior. I can affirm it to you, for I have known him well, and for a long time.' I shall be so eloquent that she will herself come before thee, will extend to thee her hand with a beautiful curtsy, and will say to thee: 'Monsieur, you have for a sister a little person who is so extraordinary that I can no longer deny your merit. Will you do me the favour to be my husband?' And thou,—thou wilt bow with grace, answering, with a reflective air: '*Mon Dieu!* Mademoiselle, if it will, then, be agreeable to you!' As to myself, I shall bless you in a protecting and pompous manner; and you will be very happy. Ah! thou seest? Thou art laughing,—thou art consoled!"

And Suzanne, tenderly taking the arm of her brother, whose emotion had not

been able to withstand so much bright and playful gaiety, drew him from the house, saying :

“ Come, take a turn in the garden whilst awaiting thy marriage ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

ON leaving the train which had brought him from St. Petersburg to Paris six weeks previously, the Duc de Bligny, fatigued by the journey,—accomplished as rapidly as possible, in a sleeping car, in which he had been much shaken,—had himself driven to his club.

Not having an apartment prepared, and the hôtel of his aunt being closed, Gaston found it very convenient to instal himself in one of the rooms that the large clubs always hold at the disposition of their members. He thought of remaining eight days or more in Paris,—time enough to finish his affairs at the Ministry, and to make a few purchases in the shops; then of starting for Beaulieu.

For nearly a year he had not been in France. He had lived in the great Russian world,—that artificial Parisian life, which is the best society to a stranger, but which resembles the mundane high life of Paris as much as a pebble from the Rhine resembles a diamond from Wisapoor.

The refined corruption of the Slavs had, however, taken possession of him; and he found great sweetness in that mixed existence of Asiatic softness and of European activity. The well-developed Russian ladies captivated him by their undulating grace and the enigmatic charm of their beauty. He wished to become acquainted with the secret of these smiling, Sphinx-like women, with eyes full of trouble, and with talons full of menace. A handsome fellow, well brought up, and bearing a great name, he was much

sought; and by degrees the image of his betrothed, hitherto so faithfully graven on his heart, was effaced, like those beautiful pastels of Latour, whose colours pale with time.

Far from Claire, he at first considered himself an exile, and wished to live severely. But how can a man cloister himself when he is the youngest *attaché* at a French Embassy, and when from all sides he sees himself the object of gracious solicitations? At the end of a retreat of eight days, strictly observed, Gaston could not excuse himself from appearing at one of the receptions of his chief. Therefore, attiring himself in his *harnais de fête*, he made his first entrance into the best society of St. Petersburg.

From that evening, the young Duke was the favourite of the Russian aristocracy. His grandfather, emigrating with

the Comte d'Artois, in the first days of the Revolution, had lived in intimacy with the families of Nesselrode, Pahlen, and Gortchakoff. Bligny was welcomed with the most flattering distinction by the great personages of the Court, and presented to the Czar, who treated the young *attaché* with marked favour. From day to day, the situation of this diplomatist, whose age was only twenty-five years, became more important, and his superiors, clever enough not to take umbrage at his success, dreamed of profiting by the influence that their subordinate had immediately conquered.

But if Gaston was an elegant cavalier and an accomplished man of the world, he was a very mediocre politician. Throwing himself into pleasure, and neglecting diplomacy, it was promptly understood that, if the society of St. Petersburg had

gained a brilliant guest, France had not acquired a useful servant.

Fluttering, humming, flying from flower to flower, the Duc de Bligny was not the industrious bee which produces good honey; he exhibited himself as a plundering and showy wasp, his golden corselet glittering in the sun. In a few weeks, he was known to be living a joyous and fast life. His well-tempered nerves defied the most crushing fatigue. He could hold his own at supper against renowned drinkers; and all the world knows how deeply the Russians imbibe. He played at the Club of the Noblesse a game of baccarat since become legendary, in the course of which his adversaries and himself, during three days and three nights, only rose from the table to recruit their exhausted strength. He vanquished the heavy punters, not by his persistent luck, but by sleep, which

stretched them all upon the carpet. He was the lover of the exquisite Lucie Tellier, the French star at the Théâtre Michel, and protected her, notwithstanding the attempts at bribery of the most ostentatious Boyards. Then, one fine day, finding her wearisome, probably because she was faithful, he surrendered her to Muscovite gallantry.

Madame de Beaulieu had divined correctly. The Duke was the hero of the winter season, and there were no good *fêtes* without him. It was permitted to him to aspire to the hands of some of the richest heiresses of St. Petersburg; but he disdained all the overtures that were made to him, and, in consequence, was only the more ardently sought.

Bligny had used-up blood in his veins. At the end of six months, the existence that he was leading wearied him prodigiously.

giously; and, as an antidote to his spleen, he found no other diversion than play. From the first time of cutting the cards, he felt himself a gambler to the bottom of his soul. He played, with an insolent good fortune, seeming to have entered that world as a conqueror. And every morning, laden by the spoils of his adversaries, he returned home, his forehead bound as with a ring of iron, his face livid, and with a taste of dust upon his lips. He went to bed at break of day,—that short, dark day of the Russian Winter, resembling our twilight,—and slept, worn out, till in the afternoon, towards four o'clock, he rose, beginning his day at the hour when the gas was lighted in the streets. He had arranged his life in opposition to the rest of the world. He lived contrariwise . . . He was a night moth, and during two years

he scarcely saw the sun. His face, refined and agreeable when he left his family, was now hard and lined. His features, grown coarse, were still very handsome ; but the charm of youth, that flower of fresh and unworn faces, had disappeared. His expression was that of a man who lives fast. His hair, brown, slightly waving, and cut short on the forehead, was becoming thin at the temples. His eyes, of an undecided blue, were hollow and deep set. The wild existence that he was leading left upon him its traces, more visible from day to day.

His aunt would have had difficulty in recognising him. He was no longer the timid young man, with a gentle voice, who passed his evenings so peacefully between the Marquise and Claire in the large, quiet salon of the old hôtel. Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, resolute and decided, a little

masculine in character, then called him, laughingly, "Mademoiselle Gaston." He had no more that winning softness that caused him to resemble a girl, but was a man, and one of the most dangerous. He had discovered in himself mines of native scepticism, believing absolutely in nothing, and placing his own good pleasure above all. The paternal blood, calmed in him by the peaceful sweetness of a retired life, had begun to boil; and the de Bligny race, ardent and passionate, which, from the time of Henri III., had supplied to the Court of France its most voluptuous Mignons, its most audacious Adventurers, its most gallant Courtiers, and its most profligate *Roués*, had in him a representative who did honour to his ancestors.

There was the strength of a giant in the fragile body of the young man. Like those *Seigneurs* of former times, full of

effeminacy and of languor, who used cosmetics for the face and hands, disturbed their pages rather than stoop to pick up their cup and ball, caused themselves to be carried in a litter to avoid the fatigue of horse exercise, yet who, on the day of battle, encased in a hundred pounds of iron, charged like demons into the thickest of the fight, accomplishing extraordinary feats of heroism. Gaston would certainly not have walked a mile to serve any useful purpose, but he was a man who would shoot for a whole day, who would fence, foil in hand, during many hours, so as to fatigue the most untiring.

It was at play that he was, indeed, all-powerful. He seemed to force fortune by his will, winning with unheard-of persistency. The worst hands became good when he took them. The bank, faltering when attacked by him, showed itself im-

pregnable when he held the cards. During two years, fortune treated him as a veritable *enfant gâté*. He was called the "lucky Gaston." If his assured fair play had not protected him against evil thoughts, he might almost have been suspected.

The remnant of his patrimony, augmented by the resources furnished by play, enabled him to live on a grand footing. He had magnificent horses, superb apartments, all the luxurious comfort indispensable to a man of fashion.

When he entered the Club of the Noblesse, the game took another aspect. It was felt directly that the engagement would be serious, and that heavy sums were about to fall upon the table. He did not exclusively keep to baccarat and to lansquenet, but willingly took a hand

at piquet, playing habitually at a louis a point, with a hundred on the game. It was to him that old Narishkine, more than forty times a millionaire, made this famous reply. When Gaston had won from him three thousand louis, he rose from the table, saying : "I prefer to go away ; if I continue, I shall end by losing some money ! "

After the representation at the opera, at the Théâtre Français, or on leaving a house where he had passed the evening, de Bligny mounted into a sledge, and had himself driven the length of the Perspective. Warmly enveloped in his furs, he loved to feel the icy wind of the night pass over his face. In this way he strengthened his nerves for the gaming-table. Towards two o'clock in the morning, arriving quite fresh and ready for play, he found his

adversaries excited, and his calculated audacity was then equal to the most intrepid.

Seated at the table, under the fiery brilliancy of the lustres, he was impassible. Neither gain, nor loss, could triumph over his phlegm. No player ever saw a more imperturbable demeanour. And when around him the most puerile superstitions were shown, he was grave and contemptuous. Relying only upon himself, a fetich made him shrug his shoulders.

He went much into society, and was very successful with the opposite sex, although not of a passionate constitution, being too great an egotist to love. The truth is that he was of a yielding disposition, and did not deprive of hope the beauties who made advances to him. He detested tears, and had no wish to cause

chagrin, from the dread of lamentations and reproaches.

Once only, he thought himself seriously in love, but the sequel will show that he was deceived. One of the greatest ladies of the Russian aristocracy, the Countess Woreseff, celebrated for her golden hair and her emeralds, was captivated by him. Closely watched by her husband, who was very jealous, the beautiful Countess could not manage to see Gaston, nor even to write to him. Much charmed with her, the Duke almost lost sight of cards. He followed Madame Woreseff in society, waltzing with her under the fiery eyes of the Count, but was not able to find an expedient in order to meet her in secret.

To mislead the husband, Gaston feigned a departure for Moscow. He disappeared for two days, and returned privately to

his apartments. The Count, reassured, abated his vigilance, and the beautiful Russian was able to pay the Duke three visits. The Countess, stepping from her carriage before the portal of Saint-Alexis, entered the church; then, leaving by one of the aisles, went with a light step to her rendez-vous. At the third interview, an alarm was given by the footman, who, having craftily followed the Countess, ran to warn the Count.

The latter, furious, hastened to the residence of Bligny, but was obliged to parley with the valet, a Parisian, artful as Mascarille. During this time, the charming Countess, in a state of frenzy, sought with Gaston an outlet. It was on this occasion that the nervous vigour of the indolent young man superbly revealed itself.

The bathroom of his hotel looked into the court of a neighbouring house. But

the window was protected by bars of iron. In an instant, by a superhuman effort, his muscles standing out as if on the point of breaking, Gaston wrenched out a bar, and Madame Woreseff was able to escape. A few seconds later, the Count, gaining admittance to de Bligny, and finding him placid and smiling, was compelled to acknowledge that his suspicions were unfounded and to withdraw making his apologies.

Devouring his rage the Count was able to show a calm face to his wife; but, having strengthened his conviction by inquiries skilfully made, he resolved to force the Duke to fight; and going to the club he took the bank. Then, the cards being exhausted, and Gaston having cut, the Count, insultingly, declared his wish that the game should cease. The Duke coldly demanding an explanation, which

the Count refused to give. A challenge followed.

The conduct of Woreseff was unanimously condemned. But the object sought by the husband was attained. The next day in a hard frost, a meeting took place. In a little wood of birch-trees, they fought, with pistols, at twenty paces, to fire till one was disabled. Gaston, excessively careful of his own life, showed no generosity to the husband of his mistress. At the signal he fired, lodging a ball in the body of his adversary. The Count, extended upon the reddened snow, raised himself on one knee, then, supporting his elbow, with a savage determination he aimed deliberately at de Bligny. But weakened by the loss of blood his hand trembled and he only succeeded in wounding the Duke in the shoulder.

The Count recovered from his terrible

wound. As to Gaston, at the end of six weeks, he resumed his usual mode of existence. But, a singular fact, the ball of Count Woreseff seemed to have cut the extraordinary luck of the young Duke. Was it the blood drawn which had deranged the happy equilibrium of his powers? Or rather, favoured till then, had Gaston wearied fortune? From this day, he was at variance with success, and lost incessantly.

His superb assurance forsook him, and he experienced the incertitude of the gambler who divines a bad card. He no longer threw his money upon the table with the firmness of a conqueror. He no longer dominated his adversaries by his imperturbable serenity. He paled now. His unconscious hands beat nervously a staccato march, upon the edge of the table. His eyes, surrounded by a livid circle,

were hidden under their brows, and his white teeth perpetually bit his lips. His play became uncertain and weak. His grand bearing of former times was relaxed and broken. At the first glimmer of day, he left the gaming-room, with hair disordered, collar open and cravat untied, the front of his shirt creased and discoloured from contact with the green cloth of the table.

He was descending one by one the steps of that ascent towards success that he had climbed so triumphantly. And the money so speedily acquired by play was dissipated with alarming rapidity. The Duke was embarrassed, and decided on borrowing, the sure sign of an approaching downfall. Requiring the help of others, he felt himself fallen and took it to heart. Formerly he had deliciously enjoyed being the sovereign of this world of *viveurs*. Chance

having raised him above all his companions, they had treated him as a master, and he was proud of that supremacy. In an instant his pedestal had crumbled. From the day when he no longer won, for these gamblers he ceased to exist. Now, on arriving at the club, he was no more welcomed by a respectful silence. He gathered to the right and to the left a few grasps from insignificant hands, no one turned from the table. He was merged in indifferent groups: they no longer feared him.

His passion for play had never been so violent as in that difficult extremity. Putting into his attacks a blind frenzy, and not calculating his play, he lost and won in one night enormous sums. No longer the skilful cavalier who is able to manage his steed. He was the unnerved horse-breaker, borne away at a mad gallop

by an animal that he does not seek to control, and who has more chance of being thrown and of breaking his bones than of reaching the goal. In fact, de Bligny never reached his goal. And for him the return of fortune was useless. Not knowing how to profit by it, and becoming excited like a madman, he lost all that he had won.

His Ambassador saved him from inevitable disaster by charging him with a mission to the French Government at Paris. The duel with Count Woreseff having caused a very bad feeling, the diplomatist thought it advisable to send away the young Duke for a time, and gave him a *congé* for three months. The mission that he had not solicited, through the pride of the combatant who would not appear to desert the fight, Bligny accepted with joy, feeling himself played out at St.

Petersburg. He hastened to disappear, so as to collect his resources and decide upon his future plan of action.

There remained to him no more than fifty thousand francs of net money, from the lowest depths of his gambling purse, which had been to him for some time a veritable mine. With reduced means, his ideas became suddenly changed. In the tumult of his life of excess, the remembrance of Claire had vanished from his memory. Now he again began to think of his betrothed, and saw, in a delicious mirage, the calm reposeful *salon* of the Hôtel de Beaulieu. By the gentle rays of the lamp, Claire was working, bending over her embroidery, her beautiful fair hair shining like gold under the light. She was patiently waiting for him, perhaps sighing. He felt that he still loved her, and made a vow to renounce the feverish

existence in which he had experienced so many joys and so many cruel cares.

He thought that if he had dissipated the remnant of the fortune left to him by his father, Mademoiselle de Beaulieu was rich, and that with the hundred thousand pounds of income from her dowry a young establishment would make a good appearance. Life in Paris was far from being as costly as at St. Petersburg, and then the time of his follies had passed. They would stay six months on his estates to economise, and devote the greater part of the income to leading a fashionable life during the winter.

The thoughts of the Duke dwelt on these hopes, and he felt himself another man, again tender and good. He enjoyed this return to the first dream of his youth. Throughout the whole length of the route, he caressed these charming projects.

And when the train stopped under the glazed roof of the station du Nord he sprang lightly upon the platform, resuming with joy the possession of this Paris, from which his mind and heart had so seriously gone astray.

It was evening. De Bligny took a child-like pleasure in regarding, through the windows of his carriage, the immense enfilade of the Rue Lafayette, dotted by numberless gas-lamps. The movement of the great town seized upon him. The bearing of the pedestrians appeared to him to have a peculiar vivacity, a special gaiety. The circulation in the streets was resounding. At the crossing of the Faubourg Montmartre, he fell into an entanglement of vehicles; the drivers apostrophised each other vigorously, and the foot passengers, hurrying to pass, slipped under the heads of the horses. His fiacre

again went on, skirting the high stone wall of the garden of the Hôtel Rothschild, then, turning by the Rue du Helder, the Duke suddenly found himself on the Boulevard.

He felt a pleasurable shock. Carriages in a long file were following each other to the opera. In the roomy landaus appeared women, in their elegant *sorties de bal*, scarves of lace thrown around their heads. The intermittent brightness of the Jabloschkoff, which threw a pale light upon the façade of the theatre,—pierced by dark openings,—glittered on the helmets of the mounted municipal guard, who, enveloped in their cloaks, sat motionless in the centre of the Place. At the crossings of the streets and of the Boulevard there was a prodigious movement. The shop-fronts flamed out into the obscurity, the pavements were black with people. It

was the magic picture of Paris at night, presented in all her terrible and powerful splendour.

The fiacre turned into the Rue de la Paix, and, in a few seconds, Gaston was at the door of his club. He alighted from the carriage, a little giddy, his ears still filled by the enervating noise of the railway, his eyes dazzled by the lights. Fatigued, he mounted to the room prepared for him, and slept soundly till the morning.

Gaston had not stayed a sufficiently long time away from Paris to have lost his taste for the Boulevard. He immediately resumed his footing upon the asphalt. His bad Russian varnish fell from him at once and he found himself Parisian from his head to his feet. During two days he had the intoxication of Paris. He went to the Champs-Élysées, to the

Bois; lounged at the Hôtel des Ventes; did the thousand steps between the Madeleine and the Boulevard Montmartre, happy to give grasps of the hand and to exchange bows of recognition. He frequented the little theatres, and threw himself back luxuriously in his orchestra stall, too narrow and imperfectly stuffed. Pieces which were simply idiotic he found exquisite. He had an inner contentment that overflowed in continual admiration. In fact, since leaving Russia, he was as one released, seeming to have returned from exile, to have escaped from the *Bagne*. He was free now; he could breathe.

In three days his affairs at the Ministry were terminated. He decided to leave Paris at the end of the week, wishing to surprise Claire and the Marquise whom he knew to be at Beaulieu. In anticipation, he enjoyed their glad welcome, and heard

their cries of delight. For an Empire he would not have renounced the pleasure of arriving unexpectedly.

While sauntering, in the Rue de la Paix, he went to buy of Bassot, the family jeweller, a beautiful betrothal ring, an enormous sapphire surrounded by brilliants, mounted with rare perfection. He saw himself offering to Claire the emblazoned case of white velvet. She would open it and, with a grave and gentle smile, would extend to him the hoop of gold that he might himself pass it, upon her slender, rose-tipped finger. Then it would indeed be finished, he would be her husband; the ring was the first link of the chain which would unite them.

Returning from the theatre, it was the eve of his departure, the Duke found the club more animated than on previous days. Making inquiries, he learned that

this movement, this brilliancy, these lights, were caused by a special representation, to be given in the Salle des Fêtes. An exclusive audience had assembled to hear *L'Education de la Princesse*, an operetta in two acts, the joint labour of two men of talent, belonging to the first society, the Duc de Féras wrote the words, and Monsieur Jules Trélan the music.

The cast was worthy of note. Baron, of the *Variétés*, lent his genius to the part of the Grand Chamberlain. Daubray, from the *Palais-Royal*, interpreted the ungrateful rôle of the Chevalier Alphonse de Rouflaquette. Saint-Germain, of the *Gymnase*, had consented, for once only, to reveal himself as a great singer in the character of Pépinster. The young Baron Trésorier, a member of the club, and the possessor of a charming tenor, had been

entrusted with the part of Triolet. Madame Judic was the Princesse Hortensia and Suzanne Lagier the Queen Mother.

A tremendous success was expected. The footmen on duty were outflanked, all the world arriving at the same time, in order to secure good places. And from the large vestibule, hung with beautiful tapestries of the reign of Louis XIV., a murmur of voices, a *froufrou* of dresses adjusted by little pats with the hand, reached the Duke, with puffs of warm air, impregnated by the delicate odour of *poudre à la maréchale*.

Instead of going up to bed, the Duke threw his overcoat to a footman, and, flattening his Gibus, he entered.

A very trivial circumstance often thus decides the destiny of men. Bligny, in going to hear *L'Education de la Prin-*

cesse, little suspected that he was going seriously to change his future.

The Salle des Fêtes was sparkling with light. A large audience filled the chairs attached one to another. It was an assemblage of satin, of velvet, of gauze, and of silk, a gamut of brilliant colours, in the midst of which shone with effulgence the whiteness of bare shoulders. The light waving of fans stirred that enormous crowd, like the motion of wings. The hum of conversation, discreet and suppressed, rose from time to time, when a well-known personage entered the hall. At the end, the stage, silent, severe, closed from view by its red curtain.

The Duke walked towards a group of black coats, amongst which he recognised some of his friends. In the centre, much surrounded, was Maître Escande, a young notary, recently appointed to his charge,

and the future heir of a family of arch-millionaires.

Attired with irreproachable elegance, he was speaking with an important air. But the sight of Bligny appeared to have nailed his tongue to his palate. He remained, his mouth open, gazing with stupefaction at the Duke, who was smilingly advancing towards them. There was a sudden silence, broken only by this ejaculation: "Oh! it is indeed a great loss!" uttered in a commiserating tone by an elderly man, rather bald, of tall figure, wearing a suit which savoured of the retired trader, his face very red, framed with large ears, surmounted by tufts of yellow hair, his throat supported by a high white cravat, diamond studs in his shirt-front, and on his feet low varnished pumps, allowing to be seen his white cotton stockings.

Bligny had penetrated into the group, and, having exchanged a clasp of the hand with his friends, waited, very perplexed by this silence, which seemed to him extremely eloquent. He was about to ask of what they were talking, and how his appearance could cause so much embarrassment, when the elderly man, leaning towards one of the friends of the Duke, whispered in his ear, loud enough to be heard, and so that a refusal was not possible :

“Present me to the Duke.”

The friend turned towards Gaston with an air very *ennuyé* and very astonished at the same time, which signified as clearly as daylight : “What a strange fancy of this Olibrius !” Then, resigning himself :

“My dear Duke, Monsieur Moulinet.”

“A manufacturer,” added quickly the

man with the diamond studs ; “late Judge at the Tribunal de Commerce . . .”

And, with an impressive manner, taking possession of the hands of the young man, he continued :

“I have the honour, Monsieur le Duc, to be acquainted with your family. Mademoiselle Moulinet, my daughter, was educated at the Convent with Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, your cousin. Yes, Monsieur, at the Sacré-Cœur, the first convent of Paris . . . For Athénaïs I withhold nothing. All that there is of the best is not good enough for her . . . And I beg you to believe that I have learned, with much regret, the painful news . . .”

In a moment M. Escande began to make a diversion, at the risk of creasing his shirt-front, or of disarranging the artistically-constructed bow of his cravat. He telegraphed with his arms, he drummed

with his feet, he exhausted himself with “Hem! hem!” But Moulinet, too far launched to stop, and, perhaps not wishing to understand,—later events will cause the latter to be believed,—continued his complimentary condolences . . .

“Pardon,” interrupted the Duke, frowning, “but I do not seize your meaning very well . . . You are speaking to me, Monsieur, of painful tidings, which, it appears, affect my family, and particularly touch Mademoiselle de Beaulieu. I do not know what you wish to say. Will you, I beg, explain yourself more clearly?”

Maître Escande appeared altogether annoyed. And, as Moulinet kept silence, his head bent, as though regardless of the question, the young notary took the initiative, and, advancing towards Bligny :

“ *Mon Dieu !* my dear Duke,” said he, in a solemn tone, “ I am grieved that you should learn this evening, and in a place so little fitted for such a confidence, the fact to which M. Moulinet has just made allusion. . . . However, as you would certainly know to-morrow all that you demand, there is no indiscretion in enlightening you immediately. Well, as you were entering, I was telling these gentlemen that, having gone to England upon business, I was advised, no matter by whom, that the law-suit, begun in his lifetime by the Marquis de Beaulieu, and continued by his representatives, has just been lost, without the possibility of appeal. . . . ”

At this revelation, so unexpected, the Duke turned pale. The loss of this law-suit, upon which Madame de Beaulieu founded such great hopes, was ruin for

Claire. Gaston made an effort, and, subduing his trouble :

“Permit me, my dear Maître,” said he, with hauteur, “to be amazed at the facility with which you made to these gentlemen communications relative to the de Beaulieu family. I did not think that my affairs were of a nature to serve as a text for tale-bearers, or for the slanderous stories of the idle. I shall be much obliged to you if, in the future, you will be so good as to show more reticence. . . .”

The young notary grew pallid at these words ; his round face became furrowed from the agitation of his nerves. He shook his head, drawing a deep breath, and, with a ruffled air :

“But, my dear Duke !” exclaimed he, “believe that . . .”

“I believe as much as I choose,” dryly interrupted de Bligny.

And, measuring his interlocutor from head to foot, he walked slowly away, followed by his silent friends.

Moulinet and Escande remained together, regarding each other for a moment without speaking; then the manufacturer, grimacing a smile:

“A stormy race, these de Bligny! You have been sharply brought up, eh! my dear Maître? And I have had my share of the splashes. It is all the same to me—a stormy race! He is ruined, that one, eh?”

“Utterly,” said the notary with disdain; “and he plays the great lord; he cuts one short; he gives one lessons. . . .”

“Exactly! Do you see, *mon cher*, the Revolutions, whatever they may do, will never make us the equals of these people.

And this Duke will be a very desirable husband for a rich girl."

Three blows, struck at regular intervals upon the stage, with slow solemnity, interrupted the conversation. Escande and Moulinet seated themselves. The Duke went to take his place at a little distance. The orchestra attacked the overture. A brilliant waltz, of an enchanting rhythm, rang out its light melody. The Duke, apparently attentive, was reflecting deeply. The ruin of Claire was a thunderbolt which blasted his future. He was affianced to Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, and she was poor. Not for an instant,—we must say it in his praise,—had Gaston thought of breaking his engagement. The idea did not even occur to him that he could marry any other woman than Claire. He considered himself pledged to her. He had upon him, next his heart, in its

case of white velvet, stamped with the united armorial bearings of the families de Beaulieu and de Bligny, the ring of betrothal. But he was more surely bound by his word than by that ring.

However, Claire without fortune, was mediocrity for his whole life, the necessity of imprisoning himself in a château in the depths of the Province, and of vegetating there as a gentleman farmer, a veritable savage, without society, from dread of the expense. It would be for the handsome, the bewitching, the exquisite Gaston, like being buried in his full strength, at the height of his brilliancy. He bitterly regretted having squandered the enormous sums that he had won. So little acceptable as was money gained at play, it was still money; and to live without resources in this Positive Century, in which each

person is estimated only at his pecuniary value, is not to live.

Then he thought with pity of the despair of Claire and of her mother when they should learn the fatal news. They still ignored it, as this fool Escande had brought it quite fresh from England. Gaston wished to hasten his journey, so as to be sooner near these poor women, to be in reach of them, to soften the blow, and to console them.

The curtain rose, disclosing a golden and autumnal scene. In front of a sunny landscape stood reapers and gleaners singing in chorus, and with all their might, to an air quick, gay, and very animated, these words of a feeble originality :

“Chantez, belles filles,
Glanez, beaux garçons,
Levez vos faucilles
Au bruit des chansons ! ”

And, as if these trivial words had thrown the Duke into a fresh current of thought, he saw himself at Beaulieu, with Claire, under the blue sky; the reapers were singing in the wheat; a warmth and a busy humming ascended from the earth. He was penetrated by a delicious languor. And, near her whom he loved, he felt happy in his poverty. It was a calm so profound, a sweetness so peaceful, after the storms of his short life of dissipation! He enjoyed it fully, and anticipated in that mediocrity to which the ruin of Claire condemned him, satisfactions unknown and captivating.

Upon the stage the play was unfolding itself, and the Chevalier Alphonse de Rouflaquette was singing his grand duo with the Princess. The caressing and passionate voice of Judic, murmuring with burning ardour :

“Viens ! A ma grandeur pour toi je renonce.
Quittons mon palais, désertons ma cour !”

And Daubray, passing his hand over the golden *accroche-cœur* of his moustache, replied, with a wicked twinkle of the eye :

“Non pas ! La grandeur n'exclut pas l'amour !
Richesse et pouvoir, conserve en ce jour,
Conserve tout pour ton Alphonse !”

And the popular artiste crowned his phrase by a long-sustained unaccompanied note : the effect was prodigious, and excited stampings of enthusiasm. *L'Education de la Princesse* was a tremendous success. The manager of the Variétés became thoughtful, dreaming already of running that little piece through the following winter.

Moulinet, thrown back in his chair, gently moved his head, like a bear listening to the sound of a flute. He thought but little of the adventures of the

Princesse Hortensia. Another Princess interested him much more: it was his daughter, the black-browed Athénaïs. He saw her at the Convent quite little, with her frock too short, coarse shoes, and red hands, her ungracious and imperfectly sculptured face, her body angular, awkward, the work of formation hardly begun. She came to the parlour, in the midst of her elegantly-attired companions, who surveyed her with an air of disdain. He was not rich at that epoch, the father Moulinet; he had not yet founded his great chocolate manufactory at Villepinte, nor invented the prospectus upon blue paper drawn up in the style of a dentist, which made his productions known to the smallest communes of France.

At that time he was selling Colonial goods by wholesale. And the noble mothers of the companions of Athénaïs

did not restrain themselves from manifesting their astonishment that the heiress of "that grocer" had been received as a boarder. The echoes of the little intrigues of the school-room had reached his ears. He knew with what arrogance his daughter was treated by the pupils. And he well remembered that at the head of the opposing *coterie*, the Nobles, as they called them, was the proud Mademoiselle de Beaulieu.

How many times he had heard Athénaïs let fall words of anger in speaking of her enemy! She vowed, while weeping, that she would be avenged. Had it not come, the vengeance, and without their having put out a hand to prepare it? Athénaïs Moulinet was now one of the richest heiresses in Paris, and the haughty Claire de Beaulieu was a girl without a dowry. The daughter of "the grocer," dressed by

Worth, her hair arranged to suit her face, accustomed to luxury, had become refined, transformed, and, illumined by her halo of millions, passed for one of the prettiest girls of the rich Bourgeoisie. The daughter of the Marquise, clothed in a little simple gown, was going to live in the Provinces, to disappear in obscurity, and—who could know?—perhaps to miss the marriage long since prepared for her.

The Duc de Bligny, so brilliant a nobleman, the bearer of so good a name! Very often, when the young Duke went with his aunt, the Marquise, to see Claire at the Sacré-Cœur, Athénaïs had become pale with envy on seeing them side by side. She divined that they were destined for each other. Claire would be a Duchess. And she, Athénaïs? She would marry some notary, an Escande or a

tradesman, like her father, and would be the parent stem, in her turn, of humiliated daughters or of scorned sons.

At that thought Moulinet gave an arrogant smile. He threw himself back in his chair, and plunging his hand into one of the pockets of his trowsers, which returned a silver-like sound of money, he murmured these words :—"Why not that? Will not my means permit me to pay for the husband who shall please her?" He turned with a grave air, and, fixing his eyes upon the elegant crowd that surrounded him, seemed to seek the son-in-law who would suit him. Supported by his millions nothing appeared to him impossible. Where was the audacious one who would repulse the hand of Athénaïs when presented to him, holding a cheque of an indeterminate value? Would it be a Count, a Marquis? What sum would

be necessary to obtain him? They had only to speak. Moulinet could as easily give ten millions as one. To the auction room for a husband! The father was rich enough to buy a Prince for his daughter.

And his glance became daring, almost menacing. It wandered vaguely over all those unknown faces, and arrested itself upon that of the Duc de Bligny. The young man was gloomy. Moulinet said to himself: "He is thinking of his cousin." And a dull irritation took possession of him. For what purpose did these confused ideas visit Moulinet? In truth, he could not have explained it. Nevertheless the commencement of a project was already budding in his brain.

There was a loud burst of applause in the hall. The curtain had just fallen upon the first act of the operetta. In

the midst of the clappings and of the recalls, the Duke rose, accompanied by his friends, and, with an air of indifference, walked towards the outlet. Moulinet followed him for a moment with his eyes, then, quitting his place, took the same direction as the young man.

On the second floor, play had not been interrupted by the *fête*. The rooms reserved for gambling rested silent and peaceful. Only the choruses of the operetta reached as an indistinct murmur to the ears of the players. Nothing had been able to distract them. They knew that those below were amusing themselves. But what did it matter to them? Their pleasure was upon that table in the form of a horse-shoe, under the blazing gas that was drying up their brains.

Women, elegant and adorned, breathing sweet odours in their fresh toilettes, were

grouped like a bouquet of flowers. They cared nothing about them. The Queen of Spades and the Queen of Hearts were a hundred times more attractive in their eyes. And, insensible to the seductions of the *fête*, deaf to the voices which were singing, to the orchestra which was furiously raging with all its instruments joyously broken loose, they sat there, in a heavy and enervating atmosphere, throwing money upon the green cloth.

Mechanically the Duke had gained the rooms. He went in that direction, as if by chance. Was it, then, his destiny which brought him yet once more, after so many good resolutions, to the side of that table? The Banker was at that moment saying: "*Messieurs, faites vos jeux.*" Gaston, drawing from his pocket a bank-note for a thousand francs, let it fall with a careless hand. He won. Full of sur-

prise : “ *Tiens !* ” escaped him. He had forgotten how to win. He was curious to see if his luck would persist, and seated himself.

Moulinet, at that instant, entered the gambling room. It was the first time that he had set foot in one, having, on principle, a horror of the so-called games of chance. He wished to have the power of correcting chance by skill. He played willingly at Bezique, but was ignorant of Whist. However, he approached the table, and, seeing that Gaston left his hundred louis upon the cloth, gravely placed ten francs beside the pile of the Duke. Apparently, Moulinet wished to have the right of watching Bligny. Not desiring to seem indiscreet, he bought this right by playing. Moulinet was a man of useful concessions.

The game continued, but the luck

turned. The ten francs of the virtuous trader appeared to have broken the charm. Bligny became pale, was again captured by his passion for play, and staked madly his last bank-notes. Moulinet, disdainful of gain, continued to risk ten francs.

When, at daybreak, the game ceased for lack of players, the Duke had lost forty thousand francs. For some hours, Moulinet, already satisfied as to the destiny of the intended of Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, had slept a peaceful sleep in his superb Hôtel on the Boulevard Malesherbes.

Gaston, his head dazed, enervated, and burning, at the time when he ought to have taken the train to Beaulieu, mounted to his room, and, leaning his elbows on the bar that crossed his window, gazed at the sweepers in the Rue de la Paix, who were beginning their work in the early

morning. The exquisite freshness of the air revived him, the pure sky was lightly tinted with rose. The young man said to himself:—"I was a fool last night, but I will leave this evening. *Au diable le baccara !*" He dressed himself, descended, took a carriage, and had himself driven to the Bois de Boulogne. In the evening he did not leave, but returned to the gaming table.

Meanwhile, Claire, unshaken in her confidence and unchangeable in her love, awaited the return of her affianced.

CHAPTER V.

IN the evening of the day on which Bachelin brought to the Château de Beaulieu two pieces of news equally bad, the loss of the lawsuit and the sojourn of Gaston in Paris, the Marquise, still quite stunned by such a rude blow, was seated in the depths of her easy-chair in the grand *salon* overlooking the Terrace. She was reflecting profoundly, and her painful thoughts betrayed themselves on her face. The Marquis, entering abruptly, tore his mother from her sorrowful reverie. She shivered, looked for an instant at her son with trouble, as if expecting a fresh misfortune. And, seeing his eyes calm, his mouth smiling, gave a sigh of relief:

“What is it?” said she.

“Our cousins de Préfont are arriving, my mother,” answered the young man. “The break has just passed the gates, it is entering the great avenue.”

In fact, in the quiet air of the evening, the noise of wheels grinding over gravel could be heard. The chilly Marquise covered her head with a lace scarf, cast a shawl around her, and, crossing the large marble-paved vestibule, furnished with tall cabinets in carved pear-tree and hung with old tapestry representing gigantic figures, advanced upon the perron. The break, describing a sharp curve, had just drawn up. A laughing face, surmounted by a *toque* adorned with *lophophore*, appeared suddenly. A hand gloved in Suède was eagerly waved, while a voice fresh and ringing cried :

“Good day ! Good day, all ! ”

The young Marquis was already at the carriage. A wave of silk sprang out with extreme vivacity, allowing to be seen upon the step a small shoe of reddish brown kid, from which rose a charming ankle, encased in a stocking of gray silk. And the Baronne de Préfont in person bounded into the arms of the Marquise, embracing her, and exclaiming in broken sentences :

“ Ah ! my aunt, how delighted I am ! Ah ! my good aunt ! It is such a long time ! . . . And you, my dear friends . . . ”

And, throwing herself with effusion into the arms of Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, she recommenced her tender ejaculations, accompanied by loving caresses :

“ My dear Claire ! It seems to me a Century ! ”

Then, without hesitation, she passed to Octave, by whom she permitted herself to

be saluted on both cheeks. After which she exchanged with him a hearty handshake in the English fashion, and laughing, rustling her gown, recovering her breath amidst little cries of delight, taking by assault in one moment the Château and its inhabitants, with an affectionate and overflowing joy. Then, suddenly, becoming serious, the Baroness cried :

“ Ah ! *mon Dieu* ! And my husband ! ”

She looked quickly around her : “ Can I have already lost my husband ? ”

A quiet voice replied :

“ Here I am, dear friend ; I awaited patiently the end of your raptures, to salute these ladies in my turn.”

And, emerging from the shade, a young man of about thirty, in a travelling costume, a small bag suspended from his shoulders by a strap, appeared in the full light, and, with smiling and easy polite-

ness, drew near to the Marquise and Claire.

“ Well ! Salute them ! ” exclaimed quickly the vivacious Baroness. “ There ! that is done ! Now, go to superintend the unloading of my trunks. I recommend especially to you the large black box containing my hats. You will answer for it, with your head ! ”

“ Yes, dear friend,” placidly answered the Baron.

And, turning to Octave, who had clasped his hand :

“ Nineteen trunks, my friend ! ” added he, with a resigned smile. “ Six hundred pounds overweight ! I believe that my wife transports artillery ! ”

The ladies re-entered the *salon*. The Baroness leaning toward the Marquise :

“ Ah ! my dear aunt,” whispered she with volubility, raising her eyes to

heaven : “ What things we have to tell you ! . . . ”

And, taking the hands of the Marquise with an air of commiseration :

“ You know that we love you, and that nothing that affects you is indifferent to us . . . ”

As Madame de Beaulieu glanced with disquietude at Claire, already attentive and lending an ear :

“ Yes, I know . . . But my husband will tell you all . . . ”

And, throwing herself upon Claire, as if to efface the effect of her imprudent words :

“ We are going to Switzerland, thou knowest ? . . . But we did not wish to pass so near Beaulieu without stopping . . . We shall stay with you a few days ; then we shall leave in a carriage, and we shall enter by the defile of Verrières . . .

Alas ! our poor Army of the East ! The Baron was wounded at Joux in the last combat of the rear-guard with the Badois of that terrible Werder . . . You understand that for me it is a pilgrimage . . . My husband behaved like a hero . . . Of two hundred men who made up his company . . . Poor fellows, frozen in the snow, it is frightful ! . . . He only brought back eighty . . . And they have not decorated him ! . . . It is true that we are Legitimists . . . Ah ! this Government, my friend, what an abomination ! . . . Do they believe about here that Gambetta will decide to accept the Ministry ? ”

And she continued, the little Baroness, smiling, animated, becoming dramatic, prattling like a parrot, passing from one subject to another with an amazing versatility of ideas and diversity of expressions,—a living kaleidoscope, changing its out-

lines, and varying its aspects instantaneously.

The Marquise and Claire hearkened to her, astonished and dazed. In the silence and calm of the country, they had become grave and thoughtful. The animation of this Parisienne, with her noisy and flighty bearing, gave them a sensation of vertigo.

Without awaiting a reply to her question, the Baroness crossed the *salon*, advancing towards a window from which the view spread in the distance, over the valley full of shadow, in the depth of which flamed the smelting furnaces of the iron-works, casting out into the obscurity the glare of a conflagration, she cried, clapping her hands with child-like admiration :

“How beautiful ! One could think it a scene at the opera. Ah ! nature ! . . . How happy you are, living in the midst of the fields and of the woods ! What a

sweet existence, and how it preserves ! Look at me, my aunt, and compare me with Claire. We are the same age, and I might be her mother. . . . It is the fatigue of the balls, of the dinners, of the visits, of the plays, the enervation of Parisian life, which fades one thus. . . . It is a veritable labour, so much pleasure ! You are smiling, my aunt. You are going to tell me that my husband and myself, we might do otherwise, and pass four months, at least, on our estates in Burgundy. . . . Without doubt. But the way ? The Baron, who is a *savant*, has his intellectual centre in the capital. He has his scientific meetings, and the Académie . . . Ah ! *mon Dieu !* the Académie ! . . . I myself have a thousand obligations, from which I cannot escape : relations to entertain, works of charity to perform . . . And then, in fine, my daughter . . . whom

I cannot always leave alone with her governess. And when we have been two months at the sea-side, two months travelling, two months at Nice . . . you see what is left. . . . Ah ! I am very tired . . . Let us sit down."

And, passing like a whirlwind between Madame de Beaulieu and Claire, the Baroness went to bury herself in the depths of the easy-chair of the Marquise.

"There, now tell me of yourself. What do you do here ? With what do you occupy your time ? And Octave ? And your neighbour, the Ironmaster ? . . . You see that I remember all that you write to me. Oh ! *mon Dieu !* what would become of one if one had not some memory ?"

Gathering herself together in her large chair, the Baroness gently closed her eyes, preparing to listen with all her heart to her aunt and to her cousin. . . . There

was an instant of silence, and, almost without transition, like a bird which, after having trilled his last roulade, falls asleep on the edge of the nest, the Parisienne, fatigued by her journey, gently let fall her head, heavy with sleep, upon the back of the chair, ornamented by old guipure, and the light breath passing between her half-open lips, indicated that she had yielded to slumber.

The Marquise and Claire exchanged a good-natured smile, and, each taking her work, awaited the waking of the charming woman, still so much a child.

The Baronne de Préfont, *née* Sophie d' Hennecourt,—the irony of appellations!—Sophie, that name of wisdom, given to this simpleton,—was the only daughter of the sister of the Marquis de Beaulieu. She had been educated with Claire at the Convent, and was one of the clan of nobles

so rude to the little Bourgeoises. And she also had been acquainted with the heiress of M. Moulinet. With the heart of an angel, but the brain of a bird, she passed her life in redeeming, by her goodness, the evil that she caused by her levity. Not a little had she contributed to the hatred vowed to Mademoiselle de Beaulieu by Athénaïs. It was Sophie who, from the first day, gave to Mademoiselle Moulinet the name of "little Cacao." And as a battle between these school-girls of thirteen years was imminent, Claire, tall, strong, more reasonable, and with a shade of hauteur, parted the combatants.

Athénaïs had been more irritated against the one who interposed than against her who attacked. And then Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, by the firmness of her character, dominated all her companions. She was, in a manner, the incarnation of

that Aristocracy which rendered life so hard to the little Moulinet. Claire, by her superiority, had brought upon herself the rancour of the despised child.

The truth is, that Claire had never been unkind to Athénaïs. But their two natures were absolutely antagonistic. Everything in the patrician offended and ruffled the Bourgeoise: the elegance of her figure, the whiteness of her hands, the rich simplicity of her dress,—even to her note-paper, stamped with coloured initials, and the gloves that she wore during recreation.

Claire and her friends used the familiar “thee” and “thou” between themselves. Athénaïs affected to *tutoyer* them all. Upon that there were terrible discussions in this world in miniature. Sophie d’Henne-court, exasperated, could not support the *tutoiement*, and accentuated “you”

to the daughter of the chocolate-maker. Claire, laughing at these distinctions, which appeared to her childish, said "thou" to Athénaïs. And the latter saw in that familiarity an insult. The hostility of the little Moulinet did not escape Claire. She affected not to notice it. And perhaps, unknown to herself, her scorn for Athénaïs became marked.

Between Mademoiselle d'Hennecourt and Cacao, war was sharp and incessant. One day Sophie, returning from the parlour, went out into the court with a bag of chocolate. She offered it to all her companions, then, approaching Athénaïs with a courteous air, stretched it out to her, saying: "Wilt thou have some? Oh! thou mayst venture! It does not come from thy shop; it is from the Marquis."

The little Moulinet turned pallid with rage, and, springing upon the bag, sent

it flying through a window, the panes of glass falling in shivers upon the gravel. A skirmish followed, in the course of which Athénaïs, being violently shoved, cut her hand upon a fragment of glass that had remained fixed to the basement of the wall. The violence of her anger, and terror at seeing her own blood, caused the little Moulinet to swoon. By a sudden change in her impulsive nature, Sophie seized Athénaïs in her arms, and helped to lead her to the infirmary, accusing herself, weeping, and afflicted at being the cause of the accident.

From this day the scene changed. Athénaïs put herself openly at the head of the faction of the Bourgeoises, and the Court was divided into two camps: the Nobles on one side, the Rich on the other. The children grew up, and their quarrels took a more discreet and sullen form,

which savoured already of the lessons of the outer world. They no longer clawed each other with their hands, but they tore each other much more cruelly by words. Claire, haughty and contemptuous, stood aside, taking no part in the war. She was none the less abhorred for it. Between herself and Athénaïs there was a perpetual though hidden struggle. It was understood that Mademoiselle Moulinet was the antagonist of Mademoiselle de Beaulieu; and, indeed, the two adversaries were of equal strength.

The father Moulinet was on the road to amass a colossal fortune. It was reported that he had discovered a way of making vanilla from coal, and that in his chocolate he substituted burnt almonds for cacao. That alimentary chemistry brought to him each year immense sums. And in the Parisian world the trader had begun to

be relied upon as of financial value. He was appointed judge at the *Tribunal de Commerce*, and his friends, when speaking of him, gravely nodded their heads, saying: "He is a very rich man."

Moulinet, jovial and familiar, said cheerfully of himself: "Papa has the purse!" For the rest he was vulgar, but not wicked. Capable of rendering a service on condition that it was to his interest to do it. Very desirous of widening the circle of his acquaintances and of purifying his society, looking always above and never below him. It was thus that he had succeeded, by continually trying to climb.

One fine day he drove to the *Sacré-Cœur* in a handsome landau with a pair of horses, sent for his daughter to the parlour, and *Athénaïs* showed herself no more at the Convent. She was then

sixteen years of age. The following Sunday her companions met her in the Bois in the magnificent carriage of her father. And, from a distance, she smiled amiably, recognising them with eagerness, as though anxious to greet them from such a fine equipage.

A few months later Sophie and Claire returned also to their families. And the war ceased from want of combatants.

Nevertheless hatred was nursed with warmth in the heart of Mademoiselle Moulinet. She followed with her eyes her rivals. At the opera, from the box on the second tier that her father had procured with much difficulty, she saw with anger Mesdemoiselles d'Hennecourt and de Beaulieu throned on the first tier in a box between columns. There was during the *entr'actes* a perpetual going and coming of elegant cavaliers. In the *salon*

at the back they were conversing, they were eating bonbons. In the box of Moulinet, no one; emptiness and silence.

Athénaïs said to herself: "Very certainly, in the number of those visitors, there is one who will propose and who will marry Claire."—The beauty of Mademoiselle de Beaulieu had become adorable. She had the exquisite whiteness of a blonde. And when she appeared in a rose-coloured robe with a low bodice, without jewels, she excited great admiration.

It was Sophie who married first. The Baron de Préfont declared himself, and the marriage was celebrated at Saint-Augustin with great pomp. There was a grand Mass, to which Mademoiselle Moulinet was not invited. However, several late pupils from the Convent professed to have seen her thickly veiled, accompanied by her maid, and watching

the ceremony from one of the side aisles. That offensive recognition was never proved. The shadow of a pillar protected Athénaïs devouring with her eyes her enemies. Claire was bridesmaid, and made the collection for the poor with the little Vicomte de Pontac. When she approached the place where Mademoiselle Moulinet had established her observatory, the latter glided away into the crowd and lost herself in the distance. Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, unconcerned, did not remark this manœuvre. She continued her collection, smiling with sweetness, and never dreamed that, if looks could kill, she would have fallen dead in the middle of the church.

Sophie married, the Duc de Bligny bound for St. Petersburg, the existence of Claire became very retired. And, having passed the last six months far from Paris,

the recollection of Athénaïs had faded completely from her mind. While watching the gentle slumber of the Baronne de Préfont, in the large chair, she thought no more of the quarrels for which that charming, giddy girl had formerly given the signal.

The door of the *salon* opening, awoke the Baroness. She saw her husband and Octave enter, and rising quickly to her feet, with all her lucidity instantaneously recovered :

“ Ah ! heaven ! You have allowed me to sleep ! ” cried she. And beginning to laugh : “ It is here, then, as in the fairy tales, the Castle of the ‘ Sleeping Beauty in the Wood.’ Hardly arrived, and we close our eyes. But, where is the Prince Charming ? Can he be you, Baron ? No, it is Octave ! My aunt, pardon me ! . . . It is the air of your country which is the cause of all ! It has fatigued me. We are not

accustomed in Paris to an atmosphere of this quality."

"It is nothing," said the Marquise, "thou art overfatigued. It is the first effect; thou wilt become inured to it."

The Baron approached with his tranquil gravity :

"Dear friend, I have executed your orders, I have sent in your luggage: the whole Château is encumbered."

"That is well," answered the Baroness, with the air of a queen satisfied with her people.

"Wilt thou that I show thee thy apartment?" asked Claire, seeing the Baroness standing, as if undecided.

"Willingly," said the young woman.

And, taking a bag of red leather stamped with her arms, that she had placed upon a chair on entering, glanced meaningly at her husband.

He hastened to her to disembarass her of it, but drawing back the bag with vivacity :

“ No, not you,” said she, “ you are too absent. And this requires caution. Stay, you, Octave.” And a second time, with a glance, she pointed out the Marquise to her husband.

“ Dear friend, I am very flattered by your confidence,” replied Préfont with a smile. “ Go, Octave, my good fellow, do the drudgery. I shall remain in the company of your mother.”

The Baroness, happy at having made herself understood, gave a little approving sign to the Baron, and, taking Claire by the arm, as if to be more sure that she would not disturb the *tête-à-tête* prepared for her husband with the Marquise, went out warbling an air.

The Baron, grave and collected, took

several steps in silence. The Marquise, sunk in her easy-chair, gazed vaguely before her. The *salon* was dark. The fire, that on this fresh October evening had been lighted, crackled and sparkled on the large hearth of rose-coloured granite, making, by the flickering of its flames, a great brightness play upon the ceiling. The Marquise told herself that perhaps the tidings brought from Paris by the Baron were better than those given by Bachelin the same day. And she again began to hope. Already, above the *salon* on the upper story, the steps, light and rapid, of the young people were heard perambulating the apartments. The old dwelling was filled by an unaccustomed movement. And the trills left behind her by the Baroness, like a subtile trace, vibrated joyously in the air.

At last the Marquise, rousing herself

from meditation, raised her eyes, and, seeing the Baron standing before her, awaiting her commands, glanced at him with a melancholy smile.

“Well! my nephew,” said she, “you have some confidences to make to me? I fear that I am partly acquainted with the subject in question, and you see me much afflicted by it”

“It is a sad affair, in fact, my aunt,” answered sympathetically the young man, “and the consideration which our world enjoys will not be increased by it. Alas! When one of our order fails in his duty, the fault committed by him falls upon all his peers. We have no more than one sole superiority over the other classes of society: it is fidelity to the thing sworn. It is still said, as a kind of proverb: ‘On the word of a nobleman.’ Ere long, when it is seen that like people of no

distinction, we cease to keep our promises, they will no longer recognise in us even the sovereign reverence for a pledged faith. And we shall have lost our last best reputation."

A tear glittered in the eyes of the Marquise, and, raising her hands, thin and delicate, to the Baron :

"Tell me all, hide nothing from me : I know already, thanks to the activity of my good Bachelin, that the Duc de Bligny has been in Paris for the last six weeks."

"Ah ! indeed, Marquise, you know all that !" said the Baron bitterly, "and do you also know that he is occupied there in getting himself married ?"

"In getting himself married !" cried Madame de Beaulieu with stupefaction, starting up in her easy-chair, her face blanching under her white hair.

“Yes, my dear aunt. Pardon the abruptness of my communication, but, in such matters, I think it is always better to go straight to the mark.”

“In getting himself married!” slowly repeated the Marquise.

“The Duke has made every effort that the news should not be divulged. But the future father-in-law, who is, it appears, a Bourgeois, and one of the most vulgar, is less discreet! He exults, the good man! His daughter, think of it then, his daughter, a Duchess! The history was related to me by Castéran, an intimate friend of Bligny, who knows how the negotiation was begun. And I regret to be obliged to acknowledge to you, my aunt, that there can be nothing more lamentable. Picture to yourself that the Duke, hardly arrived from St. Petersburg, became engaged in the high play that has

for some time been pursued at the Club. Roughly treated by fortune, he was soon at the end of his resources, which were slender. He had recourse to the coffers of the Club, to find funds with which to face his engagements. He continued to play so recklessly that his losses amounted to two hundred and fifty thousand francs. It seemed that he had completely lost his head. Maddened by ill-luck he threw himself blindly into the *mêlée*. In two evenings, he recovered all that he had lost, then lost again a hundred thousand francs. And at last was left with a definitive *culotte* of two hundred thousand francs."

The Marquise gazed at her nephew, and in an interrogative tone :

"A *culotte*?" repeated she.

"Excuse me, my aunt," said the Baron with phlegm, "it is the understood term.

To express a heavy loss at play, we say a *culotte*."

"A *culotte* of two hundred thousand francs," said the Marquise, with a melancholy smile, "it is a dear cloth!"

"The rather that Gaston had not one sou with which to pay for it. And at the Clubs that kind of debt must be discharged within twenty-four hours under the penalty of being posted and expelled. The situation of the Duke was then very critical. *Mon Dieu!* He might have applied to the family. Although all our fortune is real estate, the Baroness and myself could have readily found for him a part of the sum, and he would have been able to make arrangements for the remainder. Gaston did not think of applying to us, or rather, he did not wish it. Castéran counselled him to do so, however. The unhappy fellow shut himself in his room

at the Club, absorbed in painful reflections. He fully understood that he had seriously damaged his worldly position, and that he had compromised his future. It was then that Providence intervened, under the form of the future father-in-law, whom Gaston, they tell me, had never met more than once. He entered resolutely into the affair and held to Bligny language something like this :—‘ Monsieur le Duc, you owe two hundred thousand francs ; you must procure them in the course of the day, and you will not be able to procure them ! ’ And as the Duke rose quickly to cut short such an interview with a stranger, the old man adroitly stopped him by letting fall these words : ‘ Those two hundred thousand francs, I bring you. My fortune is enormous, and I will not have it said that a man like myself, who gives ten millions of dowry to his only

daughter, has allowed for a miserable ten thousand louis the name of one of the noblest families of his country to be compromised!’ It is amazing, my Aunt, is not it? You can understand that I do not guarantee the rigorous accuracy of the words. Castéran has a very sharp tongue, and he may easily have embellished a little. But it is thus that he related to me the adventure. The wretched Gaston was dazzled. It seemed to him that he was in the presence of a man made of gold. And *Dame*, the coffer of his unexpected benefactor being open, he put in his little finger. The hand followed, and, as when caught by machinery, all passed in, title also. This is how the Duke is getting himself married.”

There was a moment of silence. Evening had altogether come. It was difficult

in the gloom for the Baron to perceive the proudly-raised head of the Marquise. The tic-tac in regular cadence of the old timepiece of Louis XIV. was the only sound heard. Suddenly the young man saw a white cloud pass before the face of his aunt, and heard a sob badly dissembled. Understanding that she was weeping, he quickly took several steps towards Madame de Beaulieu, and kneeling at her feet upon a tapestry-covered stool he tenderly pressed her hand, not finding words to console that grief which was stronger than her pride.

“It is nothing,” said the Marquise gently, “I could not subdue my grief, I own it, and I was so cruelly struck that I could not restrain my tears. I have loved Gaston so much! He has been a second son to me. He is of my race, and all the evil that he has done wounds me

doubly. I can understand nothing of such ingratitude on his part, for he was a generous boy with a loyal soul. How could he change so speedily? Has the world the power of undoing, in a few months, the work of so many years? I reared him so carefully, so tenderly! And this is how he recompenses me! Ah! the ingrate! the ingrate!”

While she was speaking, the Baron, deeply moved, mechanically seized from the table the ivory hook with which the Marquise fabricated hoods for the little children of the Poor. And, with an irritated hand, he pierced vindictively a large ball of gray wool.

However the Marquise soon recovered her self-possession, and brushing away her last tears :

“It is important,” said she with firm-

ness, "that we act with great caution with regard to Claire. You know her. She is proud, self-willed . . . Her father was the same, a heart of gold, but a head of iron. In the height of her security she is about to be struck. She was speaking to me of Gaston this morning. The idea that he could dream of another woman has not for an instant occurred to her. She places the silence, the delays of the Duke, to the necessities of his situation. Her mind has never been grazed by doubt. Loyal and frank, she only expects from others loyalty and frankness. In a soul like hers a *désillusion* of this kind may cause a very grave trouble."

"But, my dear Aunt, do you not think that advances made to de Bligny would modify the situation? Gaston has been led away . . . In making him

measure the extent of the fault that he is about to commit, it will perhaps be possible to bring him back! And if you consent to it, I shall be entirely at your disposition for that endeavour."

"No," exclaimed the Marquise, with great haughtiness. "We are not of those who humiliate themselves and who implore. Our position, however sad it may be, is blameless and dignified. It would not please me to change it. I shall wait, to tell my daughter the sorrowful truth, that the engagement of my nephew with his new *fiancée*, is irrevocable. For," added Madame de Beaulieu, smiling bitterly, "with a man as capricious as the Duc de Bligny, one can answer for nothing, and perhaps he will again change. . . ."

"As you please," replied the Baron;

“I cannot blame you for acting as you do. To tell the truth, I expected to hear you speak thus . . . But I considered it a duty to propose to you a reconciliation . . . Let what may happen now, you have right on your side! And if there is occasion to shed a few tears in secret, at least you will not have occasion to feel humiliated. I do not say the same of Bligny.”

A sound of rapid steps was heard on the grand stone staircase, accompanied by a joyous murmur of voices. Free from care, and laughing, Octave and Claire descended with the Baroness, excited to high spirits by the restless and frolicsome young woman.

The door of the *salon* opened, and, like an avalanche, Madame de Préfont, preceding her cousins, entered the solemn and gloomy room.

“Ah! *Mon Dieu!* You are without lights! It is dismal!” cried the Baroness. “You look as if you were conversing in the depth of a tomb. It is so black that one cannot hear oneself speak! . . . My aunt, you have spoiled us . . . We have, the Baron and myself, the most beautiful apartment in the Château . . . You know that we shall find ourselves so comfortable that we shall no longer wish to leave. . . .”

“So much the better, my dear child! But I think that you ought to have gained an appetite on the railway . . . We are going to dine.”

At the same moment, and as if the words of Madame de Beaulieu had been awaited, the folding doors of the *salle à manger* were thrown open, a flood of light gleamed upon the side-boards, laden with

old china and with massive silver plate, whilst, with a voice grave and dignified, the maître d'hôtel let fall these words :

“*Madame la Marquise est servie.*”

CHAPTER VI.

THE morrow of the day on which M. and Madame de Préfont had arrived at Beaulieu, and just in time to cast a little interest into the existence of the Baroness, who had already begun to find her sojourn in the country slightly wearisome, M. Derblay, accompanied by his sister, presented himself at the Château.

Seated under a large tent of red and gray striped canvas, the inhabitants of Beaulieu were enjoying the beauty of one of those lovely days of October, the last smiles of the year soon to become sad and icy. The birds, deceived by the warmth of the sun, were again singing in the clumps of trees in the park, as in summer.

And upon the bright gravel of the terrace, two blackbirds with yellow bills were whistling, and at times disputing over some crumbs of bread that the Marquis had thrown from the window of the *salle à manger*. The Marquise, enveloped in her shawls, lulled by the sweet air, heard, with an unconscious ear, Claire and the Baroness exchanging confidences, leaning their arms on the parapet of rose-tinted granite. The Baron, gravely lying back in a rocking-chair, puffed towards the blue sky, with a calculated slowness, the curls of smoke from his cigar. The Marquis was carefully sketching, upon a page of his note-book, the profiles of the two young women, standing out elegant and graceful against the clear back-ground of the horizon. A profound calm environed this sunny corner, and little by little a lassitude delicious, invincible, took

possession of them all, enfeebling the body and benumbing the mind.

The step of a servant sounding on the gravel walk aroused them from that physical and moral somnolence. The Marquise opened her eyes : Claire and the Baroness turned, ceasing to gaze vaguely over the valley ; the Marquis precipitately concealed his note-book in his pocket. The Baron only, sparing of unnecessary movements, confined himself to slightly inclining his head.

“ M. and Mademoiselle Derblay inquire if Madame la Marquise receives,” said the footman . . .

At these words, Claire imperceptibly bent her proud brows. The name of the man by whom she instinctively felt herself pursued pronounced there, in her own home, displeased her. She had, as it were, a presentiment that this stranger would

have an influence over her life, and in advance she was full of revolt.

A sudden bitterness troubled her heart. The confused idea of having been forsaken had, however, already entered her soul. And she asked herself how M. Derblay, after his passionate demonstrations, timid as they were, could dare to present himself at the Château.

Bachelin, it is true, had announced his visit. It was a kind of reconciliation upon the ground of affairs. But the question of affairs might be only a pretext. This man was he so bold, seeing her momentarily abandoned by the Duke, as to conceive the thought of approaching her? All these reflections, still very obscure, passed in a second through her mind, and were the starting-point of her aversion to Philippe.

“Receive him, my Aunt, receive him,”

cried the Baroness. "I am so curious to see him, this Ironmaster! He will amuse us, and we will make his sister gossip upon all that is passing in the village. Perhaps she wears the costume of the country. Oh! how delightful it will be!"

"But, my dear child, I ask no better than to receive them," replied the Marquise smiling . . .

And turning towards the servant, who waited motionless:

"Beg M. and Mademoiselle Derblay to be so good as to come here."

There was an instant of silence, then the large glass door of the *salon* opened, and Philippe, accompanied by Suzanne, appeared upon the perron. A ray of sunlight gilded his brown and manly face. He showed himself in his full vigour, tranquil and severe. Buttoned up in a long black frock-coat, he seemed taller than he

was in reality. His sister, clad in a very simple gown of dark blue cloth, pressed timidly against him, her face animated by emotion, uneasy and yet resolute, fixing upon her brother her large eyes, as if to give herself courage.

The Marquise rose to meet her visitors.

Philippe, very respectfully, bowed before her, stammering a few interrupted words, the confusion of which brought a smile to the lips of the great lady. Then, as if to cut short the embarrassment of the young man, taking the hand of Suzanne with charming grace :

“Tell your brother, my child,” said Madame de Beaulieu, “that he is welcome.”

Philippe raised his head, and, with an accent of deep gratitude :

“I do not know how to thank you, Madame la Marquise,” said he, “for the

kind reception that you have given to my sister. She is a child who has grown up with me, without the care of a mother. She requires training and good counsel. She could not find better than from you, if you would do her the kindness to interest yourself in her."

Madame de Beaulieu looked more attentively at Suzanne, and was touched by the innocent and tender expression of the young girl.

"Come, that I may embrace you, my dear child."

And, touching lightly with her lips the fair hair of Suzanne :

"Here is peace signed upon the forehead of this child," added the Marquise, turning to Philippe. "All your sins are forgiven you, my neighbour. Now, come, that I may make you acquainted with my family. . . ."

And, designating with her hand Octave, who was advancing towards them :

“ The Marquis de Beaulieu, my son,” said she.

“ The introduction is needless, my mother,” said Octave with frankness, extending his hand to Philippe. “ M. Derblay and myself have already met. *Diable !* dear neighbour, you have good legs, and your hares, that I miss so easily, run no faster than yourself, when you do not wish one to overtake you.”

“ Pardon me, Monsieur le Marquis,” answered Philippe smiling, “ that I did not tell you my name . . . You were not animated by very sympathetic sentiments upon my account, and I was afraid of not being well received by you if I betrayed my incognito.”

“ Eh ! *parbleu !* I was only acquainted with you through the difficulties that we

have had together. Now it is another thing, and I hope that we shall be good friends . . . But do me the favour, I beg you, to present me to Mademoiselle Derblay."

The charm of Suzanne was working. Eager, attentive, Octave drew near the young girl. Madame de Beaulieu, then turning from the side of Philippe, and naming him to the Baroness and to Claire :

" M. Derblay, the Ironmaster of Pont-Avesnes . . . " Then, pointing to the two young women : " The Baronne de Préfont, my niece, and Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, my daughter."

A burning colour rushed to the face of Philippe, and, without daring to fix his eyes upon her whom he adored, he bowed profoundly.

" But, *ma chère*, he is a gentleman !"

whispered the Baroness in the ear of Claire. "I who had pictured him with bare arms, a leather apron over his knees, and filings in his hair! . . . God forgive me, he is decorated! And the Baron is not! It is true that under this *régime*, we suffer! In fine, it is very extraordinary! He does not, then, handle the hammer? Look at him . . . It is incredible . . . He is very good-looking . . . He has superb eyes!"

Claire, who hitherto had turned away, gazed almost severely at Philippe. She was a prey to a dull anger. She wished to find wounding words and offensive glances to cast at this audacious man. The vigorous breadth of his shoulders she thought vulgar. Everything about him displeased her, to his sombre and severe style of dress, which gave him a dignified and serious air. At the same

time, as in a rapid vision, the face of the Duke passed before her eyes. She saw clearly the elegant and rather slender figure of Gaston, with his oval face, his chestnut hair, his blue eyes, and his sensitive mouth, on each side of which drooped a long, blonde moustache. Between Philippe present and the phantom of the Duke the contrast was complete. The one represented in his robust person the sound solidity of the Bourgeoisie ; the other was the finished type of the delicate and slightly enfeebled grace of the Nobility.

Under the gaze of the young girl, Philippe remained speechless. His feet seemed to have taken root in the ground. Profoundly troubled, he tried to escape from the hostile examination of those eyes. He wished to take two steps towards the Marquis, who was conversing with

Suzanne, so as to attach himself to some one who was good-natured ; but could not do it. He cast a mechanical glance over his figure, and saw himself heavy, common, and inelegant. With a dull bitterness, he compared himself with the two young men who were walking before him in the free and simple grace of their well-fitting clothes, and his black cloth frock-coat, of a provincial cut, appeared to him hideous. He thought himself grotesque, with his high hat, and he suffered horribly.

Philippe, at this moment, would have given ten years of his life to be clothed like the Baron and Octave, and to have their easy air. He told himself that never could Claire forget the aspect under which he had presented himself to her for the first time, and that for ever there would remain in the mind of the young girl

a recollection unfavourable to him. He measured clearly the distance that existed between Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, even without fortune, and the Ironmaster of Pont-Avesnes. And, with deep despair, he reproached himself for having been so mad as to raise his eyes higher than his ambition could ever hope to attain.

The voice of Octave drew him from his abstraction.

“My dear Monsieur Derblay, we have here some one who, upon the subject of the useful arts, will be able to hold his own with you,” said the Marquis; “it is my cousin, M. le Baron de Préfont, a *savant* . . .”

“Say a scholar, my dear Octave,” interrupted the Baron with mildness . . .

“The field of science is so vast that I have but one pretension, which is that of having explored only a small part . . .”

Philippe, returning to himself, sought with his eyes Mademoiselle de Beaulieu. Graceful and stately, she had gone to a little distance, and was walking along the Terrace at the side of the Baroness. With the end of her red silk sunshade, she was touching absently the flowers of a climbing rose-tree, which had entwined its branches about the stone parapet.

The Ironmaster sighed, and, turning from this charming spectacle :

“It is not the first time,” said he, “that I have heard the name of M. de Préfont.”

And, as the Baron made a gesture of polite protest :

“Is not Monsieur the author of a very important work upon Cementation ? I am myself much occupied by that material question, and I have read with the most lively interest the treatise

that you addressed to the Académie des Sciences.”

“Oh! oh! Baron,” gaily cried Octave, “you did not expect to be so well known in our mountains? . . . See! you are on the road to celebrity, my friend; your name has penetrated to the depths of the country, and to your old motto: *Fortis gladio*, you must add: *et pennâ*. And do not think that I am laughing at you . . . I would imitate you if I were capable of doing it. . . .”

But the Baron noticed very little what the Marquis was saying! Ravished to meet with an auditor able to understand him, he had launched himself into a dissertation very learned upon the method of casting steel. And the intervention of the Baroness herself would not have turned him from his subject. His English stiffness had given place to an effusive

abandonment. He clapped his hands, while imitating the noise of machinery, to illustrate his demonstration. And, animated, gesticulating, he took M. Derblay by the arm, as if to be quite certain that the latter would not escape him.

But Philippe had no desire to avoid the increasing familiarity of his interlocutor. Rather the contrary, he encouraged it, happy to find an unexpected ally in that house where he felt himself so ill at ease. And the Baron went on, enchanted, talking exuberantly, and already calling Philippe: "*Mon cher Monsieur,*" which he would not certainly have done to any other, at the end of three months of continued acquaintance. But, in an instant, their scientific proclivities in common had drawn them together and united them, like two Freemasons who

have exchanged mysterious signs in shaking hands.

“And you extract the ore yourself? How interesting must be your mining!” said the Baron. “I will go down to Pont-Avesnes to-morrow morning, so that you can let me inspect your foundry. You must employ a great many people?”

“Two thousand workmen.”

“It is admirable! And how many smelting furnaces?”

“Ten, whose fires are never extinguished from the end of one year to that of another. You shall see my steam-hammer. It weighs eighty thousand pounds, and works with such precision that you can make it descend upon an egg, and touch it, without breaking the shell.”

“But with the like instrument you might enter into competition with Creuzot himself?”

“Exactly so; and we do in a small way, as he does on an immense scale.”

“*Mon cher Monsieur*, it is a happy chance for me to have met with you,” cried the Baron joyously. “I intended to start at the end of the week with the Baroness, to go to Switzerland, but *au diable le voyage* ! . . . I remain here, you understand ? . . . We will make experiments . . . Have you a laboratory ? . . . Yes ! You are a chemist ? Perfect ! You are one of the most agreeable men that I have ever met.”

And, taking the arm of Philippe, the Baron began to walk up and down the Terrace.

“Ah ! But what ails my husband ?” said the Baroness, drawing near with Claire.

“It is, my dear Cousin,” answered Octave gaily, “that he has mounted upon

his favourite hobby, taking M. Derblay *en croupe*."

"Well! they will go too far like that, if we do not stop the Baron."

"And why should we stop him?" asked the Marquis. "Do you dislike this confraternity of M. Derblay and de Préfont? Your husband, my dear friend, the descendant of valiant Knights, represents in himself ten centuries of martial grandeur. M. Derblay, the son of a manufacturer, represents one unique century, that which has produced Steam, Gas, and Electricity. And I own to you that, for my part, I greatly admire the sudden good understanding between these two men who blend, in an intimacy born of mutual esteem, that which makes a country grand above all: the glory of the past and the progress of the present."

“Octave, my friend,” said the Baroness, “one can see that you are an advocate : you speak so well. But for the son of your father, allow me to tell you that I find you rather democratic ! ”

“ Well ! Cousin,” replied the young man laughing, “ Democracy has invaded us. Let us endeavour to erect an aristocracy on democracy itself. To arrive at it, let us take mediocrity as our level, and above it, let us place all who have merit. We shall found, in this manner, the aristocracy of talent, the only one worthy to succeed the aristocracy of birth. Besides, in acting thus, we shall be merely imitating our ancestors. You imagine that the founders of our houses were born noble ? It was their courage which was the cause of their elevation above other men. The first de Préfont was called quite plainly Gaucher, which, without

doubt, did not prevent him from being clever, for he passes for having been a brave soldier. Ennobled by his feats of arms, and enriched by his booty, he took the name of his estate, on returning from Palestine. And it is by favour of Captain Gaucher, *ma chère*, that you are a Baroness. Why, then, should we deny to-day to men who are worth, perhaps, as much as your ancestor, the right of emerging from the multitude? Formerly they said: 'Honour to the bravest'; now let us say: 'Place to the most intelligent!'"

"Well thought and well spoken, M. le Marquis, and I pray Madame la Baronne to pardon me if I pronounce against her," said a sonorous voice from behind a clump of shrubs.

And Bachelin, very red, his hat in his hand, his portfolio stuffed with papers,

and under his arm as usual, appeared at the corner of the Terrace.

“Ah ! Bachelin, you arrive at the right moment,” cried the Baroness gaily. “Ah ! You all agree, you limbs of the law ; you are all for the *Tiers-Etat*. It is for your benefit that they have made the Revolution. But you appear like a demon issuing from a trap-door ! . . . By which way did you come ?”

“I crossed the park, on my road from La Varenne, and I have left my cabriolet at the postern gate . . . But, pardon . . .”

And, turning towards Madame de Beau-lieu, who was advancing with Suzanne :

“Madame la Marquise . . . All my respects . . . Mademoiselle Suzanne, my compliments . . . The heat is extraordinary to-day . . . I came in haste . . . I wished to be here at the same time as M. Derblay . . . But the signature of a

very important deed detained me . . . A deed which has caused me many regrets, Madame la Marquise. It related to the sale of La Varenne."

"Ah! The d'Estrelles have at last found a purchaser?" interrogated the Marquis.

"Yes, a purchaser," sighed Bachelin, "and who has paid a fabulous price, I can assure you. But he was especially anxious to possess that estate . . . And he has given for it at least a third more than they would have been able to find, even by subdividing it. He is a large manufacturer from Paris. He tells me that he has the honour of being acquainted with the family of Madame la Marquise. It is without doubt the reason that made him so earnestly desire the neighbourhood of Beaulieu."

"And can we know the name of this

gentleman?" asked the Marquise with indifference.

"His name is M. Moulinet," replied the Notary tranquilly.

Bachelin did not, certainly, suspect the effect that he was about to produce by pronouncing the name of the purchaser of La Varenne. Mademoiselle de Beaulieu rose abruptly, while the Baroness, striking her hands sharply together, cried :

"The father of Athénaïs !"

"M. Moulinet, in fact, had with him a young lady whom he called Athénaïs," added the Notary. "The estate has been bought for her, so as to figure amongst her possessions on the day of her marriage. It is an income of thirty thousand pounds, and the rents are capable of being raised."

"Ah ! it is too much ! Here they will be your neighbours !" exclaimed the

Baroness. "And M. Moulinet is going to play the lord of the manor! The poor man! He will look like his own gardener!"

"He is very rich?" interrogated Bachelin.

"Excessively rich," replied the Baroness; "ridiculously rich."

"Well! Octave, it is to this your theories lead, *mon cher*. This is the aristocracy of intelligence! M. Moulinet is one of its most glorious representatives. The d'Estrelles, who have given to France ten *Mestres de camp*, two Admirals, a Marshal, and many Ministers of State, who have the portraits of their ancestors at Versailles, and their name on all the great pages of our history, are put out of their Château by a manufacturer of chocolate, who has never rendered a service worth one *centime* to his country,

and whose name figures only upon the printed bills that he causes to be distributed at the corners of the streets. This is your democracy, *mon cher* ! Oh ! Speak to me no more of a country where such abominations can be committed. . . . It is a lost country ! ”

“Calm yourself, Baroness,” said Octave, “I think it deplorable, with you, that the d’Estrelles are dispossessed of their Château, but frankly, what can we do in it ? Must we take from M. Moulinet his money to enrich our friends ? That would be rather arbitrary. And, unless his ‘feet are scorched’ into the bargain, I do not see that worse could be done to him.”

“Leave me in peace, you are insupportable,” cried Madame de Préfont. “See, I think that you say all this in order to tease me, and that you do not believe a word of it.”

And, taking the arm of the Marquise, she went several steps to meet the Baron, who was returning with Philippe.

Claire stayed behind, immovable and pensive. The abrupt appearance of M. Derblay and of Athénaïs Moulinet in her life, hitherto so strictly guarded, troubled her strangely. Brought up in the great world, around which the rigid haughtiness of its inhabitants has traced an insurmountable barrier, she witnessed, with bitter stupefaction, this unexpected violation of her home-life. From the moment that M. Derblay entered Beaulieu so easily, and was, at first sight, placed upon a footing of equality, it seemed to her that the ancient house had become as common as the street. She resolved to take action against the rather vulgar warmth with which the guests at the Château lavished their attentions upon the strangers. And

seeing them all so smiling and so affable, she became severe and frozen.

Nevertheless, she divined in that which was passing around her something unexplained and menacing. The prolonged silence of the Duke disquieted her more than she would own. And the constrained attitude of those who surrounded her, a few shreds of phrases that she had caught on their flight, certain sudden silences when she approached unawares, an increased tenderness on the part of her relatives, had aroused her suspicions. She suffered much. To that proud and frank nature uncertainty was insupportable. It was her character to go straight at an obstacle and to attack it in front. On this occasion she did not dare. Her affection rendered her timid. She was afraid of learning that the Duke had betrayed her. And, ashamed for him whom she loved,

fearing to be obliged to prove his worthlessness, she abstained from asking questions and preserved a sorrowful silence.

Philippe saw her impassible and haughty, receiving his timid homage with hardly concealed disdain, and paying just enough attention to him to show that his presence displeased her. Suzanne, abashed, having vainly tried by a few gentle words to unbend the contracted mouth of Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, had taken refuge with Bachelin, who protected her with paternal affection.

The courteous attentions of the Marquis, visibly attracted by the simple grace of the young girl, found Suzanne sad and discouraged. The illusions that the dear child had cherished fell in an instant. She saw the happiness of her brother gravely compromised. Her precocious

good sense led her to measure the extent of the distance separating Philippe from the haughty and imposing Claire. She understood that only an unforeseen event, could bring together these two beings so dissimilar. However, she did not despair. And ingenuously, with the tenacious faith of children, she intrusted to Providence the care of removing all difficulties.

The Marquise, remembering the flattering confidences of Bachelin with regard to Philippe, enchanted by the enthusiasm of the Baron, who was actually monopolizing the Ironmaster, and, indeed, surprised at having encountered at her door a man such as M. Derblay, allowed herself to ask him to dine at the Château. Confounded by a look from her daughter, she reflected seriously, and asked herself whether she

had not been a little precipitate in giving the invitation. Upon consideration she could reproach herself for nothing. She only saw in the dissatisfaction of Claire an excess of sudden unsociableness. Besides, M. Derblay himself offered to the Marquise a means of speedy pacification. He declined with exquisite propriety, excusing himself for not being able to profit by the great favour that had been shown him, and pleading the multiplicity of urgent affairs.

In reality, he was in haste to leave. The two hours that he had just passed upon that Terrace, listening to the Baron without understanding him, his temples compressed as in a vice, his brain tormented by his tumultuous thoughts, were to him a cruel torture. He wished to escape from it. That interview, so eagerly

sought, and from which he had promised himself so much delight, was one of the hardest moments of his life. And, discouraged, cast down, ready to renounce his ambitious projects, he took leave of his hosts at the Château.

Claire did not appear to attach more importance to his departure than to his arrival. She remained disdainful and mute, responding to his respectful salutation by a slight movement of the head. Precisely what she would have accorded to a tradesman.

The retreat of Philippe would have singularly resembled a rout, if the allies already made by him at the Château had not given to him a serviceable support. The Baron showed, on that occasion, how far a mania can change the character. That man, so full of reserve, accompanied

M. Derblay to the iron gate, and shook his hand, on leaving him, with the vigour, with the cordiality, of a companion "*du tour de France*." * The Marquis himself followed Suzanne, evincing the interest that he took in the sister, by the civilities that he showered upon the brother. Bachelin, his irremovable portfolio under his arm, closed the procession. At the little gate of the park, his cabriolet, drawn by an old grey horse, which was philosophically snatching at the leaves of a hazel-tree, awaited him. He helped Philippe and Suzanne to mount into it, while the Baron carried his courtesy so far as to hold the cob by the bridle,—a precaution altogether superfluous; and while the Marquis was exchanging a last

* A journey made by artisans for the purpose of working in different towns.

smile with the young girl, Bachelin passed his whip over the back of his horse. The cabriolet moved off, the Baron and the Marquis calling, with touching unanimity:

“ *Au revoir !* ”

Philippe, with a trembling voice, responded by a: “Never!” happily lost in the jingling noise of chains which accompanied the motion of the carriage. The notary turned to him abruptly:

“Never?” repeated he; “Never! Ah! my good friend, have you lost your reason? Why will you never again return to Beaulieu?”

Philippe, at this question ceased to restrain himself, and, opening his heart, allowed to flow freely from it the bitter flood of his lost illusions. To what purpose persevere in an enterprise that was

inevitably destined,—everything indicated it,—to be miserably stranded? He was preparing for himself unmerited humiliations and piercing chagrins. It would be much better to renounce it immediately, and sever the evil at the root before it could extend itself.

“Well! *mon cher*,” interrupted Bachelin with irony, “for what did you then hope? The violence of your regret leads me to suppose that you entertained very high pretensions. Did you think that Mademoiselle de Beaulieu would begin to make advances to you like a grisette to a student? In the world to which you have just penetrated, my dear friend, sentiments habitually reveal themselves by shades of an extreme delicacy. There are neither raptures violently expressed, nor antipathies plainly declared. All is done with correct-

ness and ceremony. You have at the first stroke obtained incredible results. The men have become enthusiasts, the Marquis is your friend, and the Baron will be your colleague. The Marquise herself, carried away by the general frenzy, invited you to dine on the first day, as one does for a friend of twenty years, and you complain? But you are unjust beyond all men! To tell the truth, Mademoiselle Claire received you coldly. What a fine affair! Did you expect her to fall on your neck? Ah! you go fast to work, you! Yesterday you dreamed of nothing more sweet than the happiness of seeing her, of approaching her during a few instants. You have just passed two hours near her, and you are ejaculating despairing interjections,—you are accusing the Heavens and the Earth! And you will no more reappear at the

house. You are mad ! In the first place, you cannot refrain from returning to Beaulieu, under pain of passing for a man very badly bred. And then, will you be able to absent yourself from that adorable Claire ? Ah ! *mon cher*, you are very happy in loving ! You are young,—weep, suffer ; it is all that there is of the best in this world. There is absolutely nothing equal to it ; believe one who is old, who, as a Notary, has received many confidences during the last forty years, and who himself, at the present hour, only regrets one thing. . . . ”

Bachelin, his face animated, his eyes sparkling, was going without doubt to let escape some confession valuable to record, but his eyes fell upon Suzanne, who, while attentively listening to him, was stripping the petals from a beautiful rose gathered by the Marquis upon the

Terrace at Beaulieu. The Notary stopped abruptly, and, giving a vigorous blow of the whip to his cob, which was trotting along his head between his legs :

“Believe me, my dear friend, return to the Château. Mademoiselle Claire will shortly have some cruel trials to support, and her attitude with regard to you will be singularly modified by events. Ah ! Already you have ceased to say : ‘Never.’ That is an improvement ! To-morrow you will say : ‘Always.’ But here we are at Pont-Avesnes. I shall not enter with you. I have some urgent work to give to my clerks . . . Now go, a good appetite, and see everything in rose-colour ! ”

Bachelin, having given a last grasp of the hand to Philippe, having gallantly kissed the fingers of Suzanne, threaded rapidly the principal street of the Market

Town, and soon disappeared at the angle of the square.

Philippe sighed, opened the small door of the court, and, with head bowed, followed his sister, who, respecting his silent sadness, re-entered the house that two hours earlier he had quitted, his heart palpitating with hope.

END OF VOLUME I.



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